

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 32 : Number Two : Summer 2011



Psychology and Catholicism

Living on Wreckage

Discerning Choices for New Life

PROCESSED

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Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief, Robert M. Hamma (rhmma@regis.edu) as an e-mail attachment. Please allow four to six weeks time for a response.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

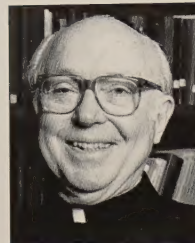
Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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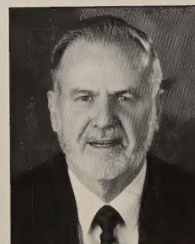
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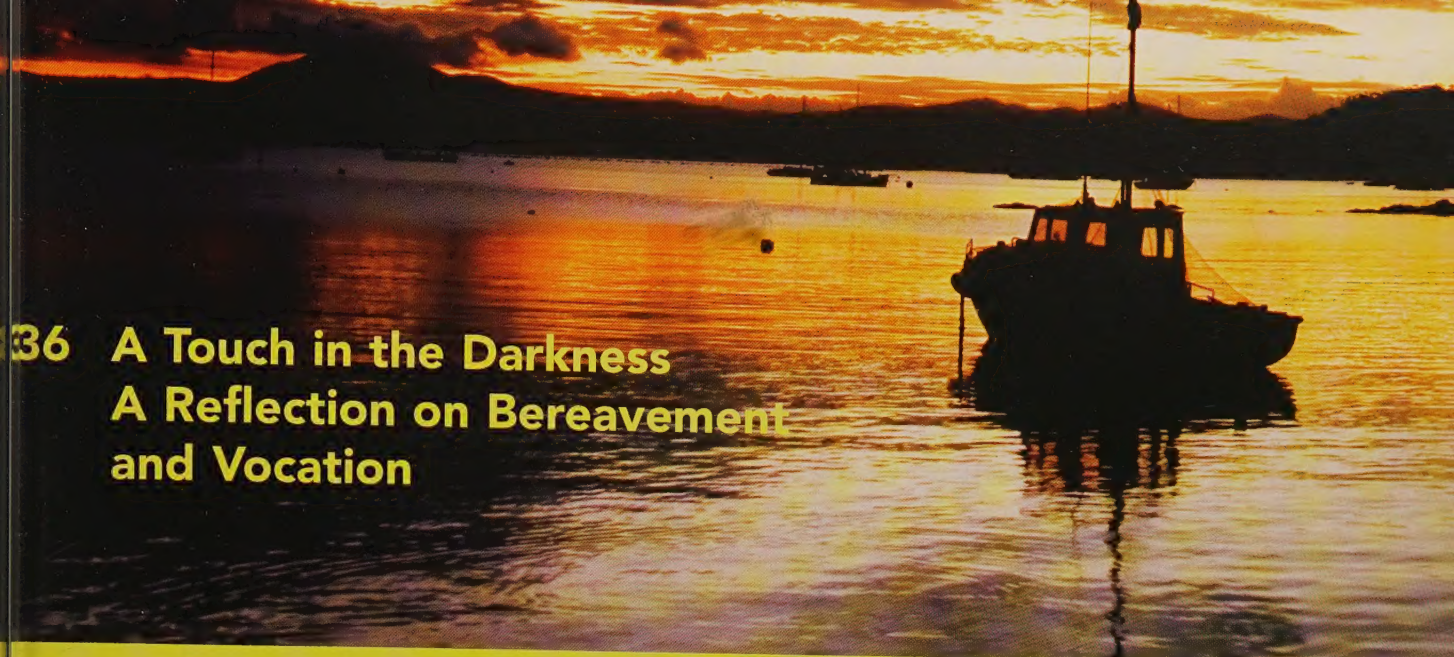
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The quarterly magazine HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (ISSN 0197-3096) is published by Regis University. Subscription rate: United States and Canada, \$49.00; all other countries, \$53.00. Online subscription: \$24.00 for one year. Single copies: United States and Canada, \$10.00 plus shipping; all other countries, \$10.00 plus shipping. Non-profit postage rate paid in Denver, Colorado. Postmaster: Send address changes to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright 2011 by HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

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36 A Touch in the Darkness A Reflection on Bereavement and Vocation

CONTENTS

- 2 Editor's Page**
- 3 Psychology and Catholicism
An Evolving Relationship**
Len Sperry M.D., Ph.D.
- 3 Rising on Wreckage
Connections between Suffering,
Spirituality and Growth**
Mary Beth Werdel, Ph.D.
- 14 Lessons in Loss**
Mary Ellen Dougherty, S.S.N.D.
- 16 Discerning Choices for New Life
A Survey of Options**
Ted Dunne, Ph.D.
- 27 Why Are So Many So Misinformed
Nine Years after the Clergy Abuse
Crisis in America?**
Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D.
- 30 Is Celibacy the Main Reason for the
Lack of Vocations?**
Michael H. Crosby, O.F.M. Cap.
- 34 Finale of the All-Out Person**
James Torrens, S.J.
- 36 A Touch in the Darkness
A Reflection on Bereavement
and Vocation**
Ben Harrison, M.C.
- 42 Closure**
James Randolph Jordan, D.Min.

Editor's Page

Summer 2011



Spirituality begins with our human experience. Our family lives, our childhood and adolescent experiences, our adult relationships—these are the clay the Potter uses to mold our spiritual lives. Grace builds on nature, as Karl Rahner famously said. While faith is first of all a gift, it comes wrapped in the joys and pains of interpersonal relationships.

Among the articles in this issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** are three poignant examples of how spirituality is woven into our human relationships. Sister Mary Ellen Dougherty's "Lessons in Loss" reflects on the process of letting go as the losses mount up in the later years of her life. "A Touch in the Darkness" by Brother Ben Harrison likewise reflects on loss, the death of his mother in childhood and how it led him on a difficult journey "to seek the One who held the pieces and could forge within me a new heart." And James Randolph Jordan's reflection "Closure" tells the story of coming to terms with the pain inflicted by an alcoholic father. These authors reflect on love and loss, searching and finding, hurt and forgiveness. They narrate how they came to recognize the presence of grace along the diverse paths their lives have taken. Additionally, we feature two articles that consider the relationship of psychology and spirituality from a more theoretical perspective.

Mary Beth Werdel offers us a framework through which we can make the connections between our experience of suffering and spirituality. In her article "Rising on Wreckage," she draws from psychological research on coping with trauma to reflect on the role of faith and relationships in overcoming life's inevitable suffering. "It is through this relationship [with God] that many of us come to find the strength to rise on life's wreckage; it is through this relationship that many of us come to find the hope that allows us to journey on, to journey well; it is through this relationship that many of us endure our suffering and, by it, grow."

From our vantage point today, we often take for granted that psychology offers us enlightening perspectives for understanding ourselves in relationship with God. Len Sperry's article, "Psychology and Catholicism: An Evolving Relationship," reminds us that the relationship between psychology and Catholic spirituality has not always been so harmonious. Historically, there was a gap between spiritual and psychological approaches to human growth and fulfillment. Some psychological theories and practices viewed spiritual disciplines and experiences as unhealthy. This in turn created a mistrust of psychology among Catholics. In reviewing this history, Sperry helps us remember that not all forms of psychology are conducive to spirituality and that its insights must be used carefully in cultivating one's relationship with God.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT is founded on the principle that psychology and spirituality are not only compatible, but mutually beneficial and necessarily connected. Holistic human development is both a spiritual and psychological process. Psychology's description of the fully integrated human person must be judged in the light of a Christian anthropology. While psychology and spirituality are separate disciplines, they coexist in a mutually critical relationship. One of the ways that psychology assists spirituality is to point out when religiously motivated behaviors may be self-destructive rather than integrative. And spirituality offers a vision of the human person whose ultimate calling is not self-fulfillment but self-transcendence through love for others and for God.

As you read the articles in this issue, we hope that this creative and dynamic tension brings new insight and deeper appreciation of the ways grace permeates and builds on our fragile and wounded human nature.

With this issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** we welcome Ann Garrido, D. Min., as a new Senior Editor. Ann is a faculty member at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis where she is Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Director of the Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and Associate Professor of Homiletics. Ann brings a host of pastoral, theological and formation experience to **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** and we are delighted that she generously agreed to join our team.

Robert M. Hamma

Robert M. Hamma

Beginning in 2011 **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** will no longer send subscribers 3 renewal notices. As a way to save on postage and stationery, we will send only 2 notices. The first will arrive 3 months before your subscription's expiration date. The second will arrive 1 month after the expiration date. We will also be sending all of our online subscribers a renewal notice by e-mail. This too will help us keep our costs down. Thanks for your cooperation!



PSYCHOLOGY AND CATHOLICISM

Ken Sperry M.D., Ph.D.

An Evolving Relationship

The recent promulgation of *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* (*Guidelines*) has evoked a predictable range of responses, from total support of psychology to abject distrust of it. Psychology's influence on Catholicism in general, and priestly formation in particular, has been controversial for a long time. Over the years the relationship of psychology and Catholicism has evolved, despite suspicion of psychology by some Vatican officials, seminary personnel, Catholic college and university faculty and students, and other lay persons.

I clearly recall my first experience with such distrust. It occurred during my first psychology course. The book used in most introductory courses at Catholic universities then was *Persons and Personalities: An Introduction to Psychology* by Annette Walters, Ph.D., and Kevin O'Hara, Ph.D., both psychologists and religious. In what was otherwise a standard treatment of the subject matter of scientific psychology, the authors interspersed statements and observations reflecting Catholic beliefs and values. For example, in the chapter on personal adjustment, psychological criteria for healthy adjustment were described. Added to those criteria was the beatific vision, described as the ultimate criteria of healthy adjustment. In the last chapters of the book on the future of psychology, the authors reflected on the distrust of psychology among Catholics: "In the past many students have avoided specializing in psychology because every major system of psychology had some objectionable features as viewed by Christians. . . . Catholic scholars have been prolific in their negative criticisms of psychology. Their research has been devoted chiefly to exposing errors in existing systems of thought." Fortunately, they were able to add: "But we note a new trend in Catholic circles today. . . . The time has come, we believe, when Catholic scholars must more and more take the initiative in developing positive views" (p. 641). Many scholars, clergy, religious, and lay persons have helped foster a positive view of psychology over the ensuing years, while others have fostered a negative and distrustful view. What accounts for this phenomenon of ongoing distrust of psychology?

Sister Annette Walters is quoted as saying an organization like ACPA was needed to alleviate the distrust of religious superiors toward psychology and pave the way for it to be "respectable for a religious to be a psychologist."

In order to better understand and appreciate this distrust of psychology in relationship to Catholicism, it is necessary to understand something about the objections themselves, and something about those who continually object and distrust. The first section of this article will describe psychological theories that are compatible or incompatible with Catholicism, particularly the past seventy years of psychology in America. The second section will reflect on the distrust of those who might be characterized as displaying psychological fundamentalism.

COMPATIBLE AND INCOMPATIBLE PSYCHOLOGIES

Distrust among Catholics about psychology often involves objections to a theory, approach or a specific construct that is perceived to be incompatible with the Catholic worldview. Compatible psychological theories and approaches typically include the following key constructs or premises: made in the image and likeness of God, spirit or soul, sin and grace, free will, moral behavior or actions, and a balance between communal and personal needs. Incompatible psychological theories and approaches are ones that exclude one or more of these constructs or premises, or include incompatible ones. Examples of such incompatible premises in psychology include: scientific naturalism (the belief that everything is material but has no spiritual or supernatural dimension), reductionism (explanations of all behavior, including spirituality, that are reduced to biological or biochemical bases), determinism (belief that behavior is caused by natural process and not the result of choice), evolution (conviction that humans evolved from simpler organism and are not created in God's image) and relativism (the assumption that there are no absolute standards of right or moral values to guide human behavior). To date, some would say that only one psychological theory has been fully compatible with Catholicism and that was neo-scholastic psychology (described below). In contrast there have been theories and approaches that are less compatible

with a Catholic worldview, such as early behaviorism and behavior therapy, and classical psychoanalysis.

The American Catholic Psychological Association

Understanding the history and influence of the American Catholic Psychological Association (ACPA) is also useful in appreciating the wariness of distrust of Catholics toward psychology. During its existence, from its incorporation in 1948 to its de-incorporation in 1968, this professional organization left an indelible imprint on the face of American psychology, particularly in reducing Catholics' distrust of and suspicion toward psychology.

ACPA was founded during the time psychology underwent a transition from being a branch of philosophy—specifically moral philosophy—to becoming a natural science. For psychology to become a science, it had to formally and decisively divorce itself from philosophy. To accomplish this, psychology had to stop equating personality (in its scientific sense) with character (in its moral sense) and relinquish its claim to being value-based. Accordingly, psychology became a value-free science that studied personality empirically in the 1940s and 1950s.

William Bier, S.J., a pioneer in clinical psychology, the psychology of religion, and the psychological assessment of seminarians, founded ACPA. At one of its first meetings, Sister Annette Walters is quoted as saying an organization like ACPA was needed to alleviate the distrust of religious superiors toward psychology and pave the way for it to be "respectable for a religious to be a psychologist." The organization began with 220 members and at its peak in 1965 had 840 members. ACPA was formed to accomplish two objectives. The first was to increase participation of Catholics in scientific psychology. Achieving this objective required the expansion of undergraduate and graduate psychology programs in Catholic colleges and universities. Equally important was the development and advocacy of psychological assessment in seminary and religious

life. In 1954 there were 195 Catholic colleges and universities, but only 31% had psychology majors while 78% offered coursework in experimental psychology, a good indicator that psychology was considered a science at that institution. In the mid-1960s all Catholic universities and colleges had developed psychology majors and adopted a scientific focus. Achievement of this first objective was ACPA's legacy.

The second objective of ACPA was to bring the Catholic perspective to bear on the emerging field of scientific psychology. For Bier and others, this meant that neo-scholastic psychology had to become dissociated with the emerging Catholic view of scientific psychology. Accordingly, ACPA leadership actively endeavored to "lead Catholics out of a neo-scholastic ghetto into natural scientific psychology." In other words, the goal was assimilation of Catholic psychology into the mainstream of American psychology. This was to be accomplished by distancing itself from neo-scholastic psychology, by having ACPA members present research papers at annual meetings of the American Psychological Association (APA), by advocating for ACPA to become a formal division of APA, and by outlining a scientific theory of psychology compatible with the Catholic worldview. This second objective was partially achieved, except for the scientific theory.

In 1968, ACPA concluded that its objectives had been achieved and that it could now reconfigure itself into an organization that was open to other denominations and other world religions. Accordingly, in 1970 ACPA became known as Psychologists Interested in Religious Issues, which then became the Division of Psychology and Religion of the American Psychological Association in 1975. In hindsight, it may have been somewhat grandiose to expect that any organization could actually develop a scientific theory compatible with the Catholic perspective in just twenty years. This dream has never really died as some Catholic psychologists continue to develop such a theory, primarily by reformulating neo-scholastic psychology.

Neo-scholastic Psychology

Neo-scholastic psychology was derived from neo-scholasticism which was the dominant philosophical basis of Catholicism from 1860 to 1960. Neo-scholastic psychology would become the intellectual substrata for psychology from the Catholic perspective. In 1879 Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Aeternis Patris* that introduced neo-scholasticism and neo-scholastic psychology into seminaries and Catholic universities. Archbishop Désiré-Joseph Mercier, who would soon become a cardinal, was appointed to spearhead this development. Mercier insisted that psychology was no longer a branch of philosophy but was now a science, the science of the soul. It was expected that neo-scholasticism would infuse both experimental and clinical psychology. It is noteworthy that William Wundt opened the first psychology laboratory in Germany that year, after which William James established a similar laboratory at Harvard University.

Presumably, the pope's hope was that the Catholic worldview would emanate from this new focus on neo-scholastic psychology. However, the view that psychology was the science of the soul was poorly received by many non-Catholics, and subsequently by an increasing number of Catholics. Efforts to make the soul the basis for empirical research failed. In fact, ACPA as an organization did not support the introduction of neo-scholastic psychology in newly formed psychology programs at Catholic colleges and universities.

Because ACPA members and other humanistically oriented and spiritually oriented psychologists were sensitive to self-actualization and the spiritual domain, there was support for a broadened view of psychology. Accordingly, in the late 1950s through the 1970s, there was considerable support for humanistic psychology, existentialism, and, later, transpersonal psychology and positive psychology. Instead of using religious constructs like soul, these approaches emphasized constructs like self, person, existence. This strategy seemed to work and as a result neo-scholastic psychology slowly faded

The second objective of ACPA was to bring the Catholic perspective to bear on the emerging field of scientific psychology.

and disappeared around 1960. About the same time, neo-scholasticism ceased to be the official philosophy of Catholicism. These developments were greeted with hopefulness by some Catholics and wariness and distrust by others.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNDAMENTALISM

The term *fundamentalism* is typically associated with religious fundamentalism which can be defined as strict adherence to basic religious doctrines and principles. Religious fundamentalists tend to be intolerant of other views and oppose secularism. By contrast, psychological fundamentalism does not involve religious doctrines and instead reflects an individual's basic pattern of thinking and evaluating life. Underlying this type of fundamentalism is the assumption that there is only one view of reality and only one way to understand experience. Individuals with such fundamentalist beliefs typically reinforce their way of thinking and evaluating by seeking support and confirmation from those who share the same or similar beliefs, and avoid any information that would contradict their beliefs. Psychological fundamentalism is characterized by thinking in black/white and either/or terms. Basic to either/or thinking is that there can only be this position or that position, since there can be no middle or midway position. This type of fundamentalism also includes feelings of self-righteousness and defensiveness, and it is often accompanied by behavioral responses that are judgmental, domineering, or contemptuous.

Psychological fundamentalism can be an ongoing pattern or a transitory one. That means that some individuals consistently function in this psychological fundamentalism fashion, while others transiently experience it in situations that are highly reactive, stressful or fear producing. The basis for the reactivity and fear may not always be clear in the moment, but what is clear is that quickly taking a position "solves" the problem or concern and reduces fear and distress. When individuals are in this transient state, effective communication seldom occurs.

Basically, religious fundamentalism involves specific religious *content*, while psychological fundamentalism primarily involves a *process*—a rigid way of perceiving, thinking, and evaluating—without content that is specifically religious. Accordingly, all religious fundamentalists are psychological fundamentalists, but not all psychological fundamentalists are religious fundamentalists. Obvious exceptions are atheists, agnostics and other so-called secular fundamentalists. Atheists who rail against religious fundamentalists may consider themselves objective and open-minded, however, staunch atheists and religious fundamentalists share one thing in common, they are both, at their roots, psychological fundamentalists.

The opposite of psychological fundamentalism is differentiation. Differentiation is a term used to describe a personality characteristic of people who are able to hold contradictory viewpoints while maintaining their own beliefs. For example, a person who has a very low level of differentiation may not be able to tolerate much, if any, disagreement. In contrast, a more highly differentiated person is able to see things from both sides, and may even agree with another's criticism, but can still maintain an allegiance to one's own beliefs. They engage in both/and thinking instead of either/or thinking.

A model of cognitive development can be helpful in understanding this phenomenon. Jean Piaget and others have described various stages of cognitive development and thinking styles: pre-operational, concrete operational, formal operational and post-formal operational thinking. Pre-operational is a way of thinking that is ego-centric and emotionally focused. Concrete operational is a way of thinking that is rigid and category-based, e.g., either/or and black/white categories. The statement: "This psychological theory is either compatible with my faith or it is not compatible" is an example of either/or thinking. Similarly, the statement: "If this psychological theory even hints of secularism, it is not to be trusted" is an example of black/white categorical thinking.

Formal operational or logical thinking is a way of thinking that involves the capacity to use inductive and deductive reasoning and abstraction to make decisions and solve problems based on logic. Post-formal operational thinking is the highest level of cognitive development. Also called post-formal thinking, it is more complex than logical thinking and involves making decisions based on situational constraints and circumstances, and integrating emotion with logic. It relies on subjective experience and intuition as well as logic, and is useful in dealing with nuances, ambiguity, contradiction, and compromise (Commons and Richards, 2003).

It is not uncommon for individuals with a limited capacity for post-formal thinking to experience more difficulty with emotionally-charged situations than those with a greater capacity for it. Discussions involving emotional issues often reveal differing responses which reflect the capacity for post-formal thinking. Those with little capacity for it tend to believe that there are absolutely clear right and wrong ways for dealing with complex situations, while those with much more capacity for it are more capable of nuance and dealing with ambiguity. Estimates are that 2% of adults routinely function at post-formal operations, 20% at formal operations, with the remainder at concrete operations or pre-operations. However, it has been observed that individuals can regress back to a prior level of thinking when sufficiently stressed. That means that those who function as concrete, categorical thinkers can become more pre-operational and emotionally focused in their thinking.

It is interesting to note that many believe—insistently—that the church has roundly condemned psychology, or at least a particular psychological approach. The fact is that there has been no such condemnation. Although the Vatican, and even a pope, has expressed misgivings about certain tenets of psychoanalysis, the church has not condemned it. It is noteworthy that in his foreword to the book, *Psychoanalysis and Catholicism*, Cardinal Suenens concludes: "Contrary to the

widely held opinion amidst the Catholic Church as well as by others, the church hierarchy never condemned Freud or psychoanalysis." He quotes Pius XII, who, while disapproving of the element of pan-sexualism (belief that all behavior is motivated by the sexual drive) in psychoanalysis, also declared that any psychoanalytic approach which he described as the "psychology of the depths must not be condemned if it discovers the contents of religious psychism and strives to analyze and to reduce it to a scientific system, even if this research is new and even if its terminology cannot be found in the past" (Discourse at the Congress of Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology, 1953). Despite the church's statements to the contrary, what explains why some continue to believe that psychoanalysis was condemned? Such a belief reflects either/or, categorical thinking that does not comprehend nor appreciate subtle and nuanced distinctions.

More recently, Vatican II recognized the value of scientific psychology. *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*) states: "In pastoral care sufficient use should be made, not only of theological principles, but also of secular scientific discoveries, especially psychology and sociology: in this way the faithful will be brought to a purer and more mature living of the faith" (no. 62). That this Vatican II document concludes that psychology can foster psychological and spiritual maturity is a clear and ringing endorsement of psychology.

More specifically, the *Guidelines*—approved by Pope Benedict XVI—also affirm the value and need for psychology in both the admission and formation process of seminarians. In fact, Section III, the longest section of the document, is entitled: "Contributions of Psychology to Vocational Discernment and Formation."

CONCLUSION

The relationship of psychology and Catholicism has evolved over the past century such that psychology shifted from having a perceived peripheral

role to a more central role in daily life. The distrust and wariness of psychology that reached its peak in the 1940s and early 1950s among the Catholic hierarchy, scholars, and laity was largely resolved thereafter. Papal pronouncements, Vatican II documents, and the recent *Guidelines* have essentially affirmed psychology's role in fostering psychological and spiritual maturity in both laity and priests, even though some psychological theories and approaches may not be fully compatible with the Catholic worldview. Such incompatibilities usually involve elements of humanistic psychologies which emphasize self-fulfillment and foster individualism and a narcissistic-focused spirituality.

It is reasonable and understandable for Catholics to be wary or distrustful of such specific incompatible elements. However, it is less reasonable to roundly dismiss and be distrustful of all or most elements of such theories and approaches on the grounds that they represent secular humanism, socialism, psychoanalysis or similar explanations common among psychological fundamentalists, whether they are religious or secular fundamentalists.

It is noteworthy that while the Church's stance—as depicted in papal statements and Vatican documents—toward psychology is generally quite positive, some continue to believe that the Church has roundly condemned psychology. Perhaps this reflects less differentiated thinking patterns, i.e., either/or and black/white thinking, than malice. The reality is that the Catholic Church has not roundly condemned any psychological approach in its totality, including classical psychoanalysis. Instead, the Vatican appears to have wisely offered differentiated and nuanced criticisms of specific approaches, while generally recognizing the value and utility of psychology. As the role of psychology in the church continues to evolve, perhaps the Vatican's stance can serve as a positive role model for those who are disposed to be fearful and distrustful of the science of psychology.

RECOMMENDED READING

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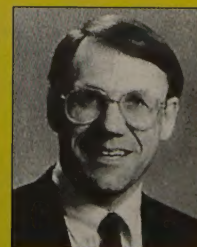
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RISING ON WRECKAGE

Mary Beth Werdel, Ph.D.

Connections between Suffering, Spirituality and Growth

Nor deem the irrevocable Past,
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If, rising on its wrecks, at last
To something nobler we attain.

(Longfellow, *The Ladder of St. Augustine*, 45–48)



Trauma researchers have long examined the suffering that exists in our world. The experience of extreme stress and trauma has been described as that which threatens or shatters the basic assumptions on which we build our lives (Janoff-Bullman, 1992). Our assumptive worlds provide for us a framework for understanding our self and how to navigate life. As a result of experiencing extreme stress and trauma, our sense of understanding is lost; our world no longer makes sense. We stand at the bottom of our life wreckage; we stare at the debris created by the loss of our assumptive sense of home. Often, we experience a deep and profound sense of sadness. And if we can allow ourselves to feel vulnerable, often, we may cry.

Upon reflection, our reality seemingly moves from bad to worse. The truth, if such a concept exists, is that we cannot avoid experiences of suffering if we are alive. Even if we cure cancer, we cannot cure death. Even if we build defenses around us to attempt to avoid suffering, we come to find that which we hoped would protect us, paradoxically becomes the very thing that leads us to suffer. If we avoid relationships so not to feel the pain of loss, we come to find that we experience isolation and loneliness ever still. A reality of our human existence is that we *will* suffer. Perhaps closer to the truth for many is that we *have* suffered.

With such an understanding we must wonder. Is there any hope to be felt? What is our fate as humanity? What do we do with all of this pain? To whom can we give our tears?

Traditionally, trauma researchers have taken a medical model approach to understanding the phenomenon (e.g. symptom reduction). They have asked questions such as: What causes suffering? What are the negative effects of suffering? What can we do to suffer less? Such questions are

undoubtedly necessary to ask and answer. Because researchers and clinicians have asked and answered such questions there exist a number of solid, evidenced-based treatments for working with people who experience extreme stress and trauma. However, more recently, researchers in the field of positive psychology have examined trauma from a different perspective. This new angle is one that spiritual traditions are not only aware of, but on which the foundations of many faith traditions base their core beliefs—namely the connection between suffering and growth.

Posttraumatic growth is the psychological term coined by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun to describe the incremental positive changes that a person experiences as a result of enduring stress or trauma. Growth can include positive changes in regard to perceptions a person has about one's self, about one's social relationships, and about the meaning and purpose of life. The phenomena of posttraumatic growth in no way seeks to discount the profound negative effect that trauma has on individuals, on communities, and indeed even on our world. What research in this area suggests is that the negative effects of enduring stress and trauma are not the complete narrative.

MEANING AND GROWTH

Psychological research on coping articulates that when a person experiences a trauma, the usual forms of coping, namely problem-solving coping and emotion-focused coping, are not effective. Trauma is not solvable and managing one's emotions around the trauma does not serve to decrease feelings of distress. Only meaning-making coping, an intrapsychic cognitive process of searching for and creating new meaning, can meet an irreconcilable experience such as trauma (Park, 2005).

Meaning-making is more than a positive reframe (Neimeyer, 2000). The meaning-making paradigm of coping articulates that we all operate from two forms of meaning: (a) global meaning—our overall beliefs about the world and self in regard to justice, fairness, control, and predictability,

and (b) situational meaning—the meaning we assign to specific life events (see Park, 2005 for a more detailed description). For many the global beliefs from which one operates include such ideas as: bad things do not happen to good people; young people are not supposed to die; I will always be employed; natural disasters will not occur near me. When a stressful or traumatic event is experienced, a person may assign situational meaning to the event that is in contradiction to their global meaning. For example, if I believe young people are not supposed to die and then my fifteen-year-old cousin suddenly dies in a car accident, then cognitively, I experience dissonance between the two belief systems; my mind struggles to comprehend the event. Emotionally, I experience a feeling of distress. The meanings that are our pre-trauma framework for understanding the self and our world are the cause of our distress. And so we seek, somewhat automatically and somewhat deliberately, to repair the dissonance, to decrease the distress, to find new meaning.

There are three options when faced with contradictions in belief systems: (a) change one's situational beliefs and assimilate the information into one's global beliefs; (b) change one's global beliefs so that one can accommodate the situational meaning; or (c) do neither and remain in distress. Growth is experienced when in the meaning-making process we come to positively alter our beliefs in regard to how we understand ourselves, our relationship with others, and our philosophy of life. We may come to learn new ways of coping, new ways of expressing feelings. We may start or deepen a relationship with another or with God. We may have a new desire to have an impact on the world.

Who can experience growth after stress and trauma? The experience has been documented across a number of different populations, including those living with physical health issues, with various stages of breast cancer, experiencing bereavement, and victims of physical and sexual assault. There is evidence of growth in people both with and without symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research has highlighted a number

of factors that appear to be related to growth including openness, optimism, hopefulness and various aspects of faith.

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN GROWTH

It is perhaps not surprising that it has been argued by research psychologist Crystal Park that religion may be the "most unfailing" way to form meaning after instances of trauma. Empirical research has supported the connection between religion and meaning-making, as well as the connection between aspects of religion and spirituality and posttraumatic growth. Correlational studies, which examine the ways in which two variables co-vary together but not in cause and effect relationships, suggest that growth after stress and trauma is related to aspects of religion such as religious orientation, a religious openness to facing existential questions, frequency of prayer, and attendance of church services.

A recent study by Werdel (2010) examined the way in which two specific aspects of a person's faith relate to the experience of posttraumatic growth and the way, in turn, that the spiritual aspects relate to the potential connection between posttraumatic growth and positive affect. The first aspect of spirituality examined was faith maturity, defined as the "degrees to which a person embodies the priorities, commitments, and perspectives of a life transforming faith" (Benson, Donahue, Erickson, 1993). Faith maturity as defined captures not religious doctrine or practices but the lived experience of faith manifested in daily life. The second aspect of faith examined was spiritual struggle which was defined as the degree to which a person feels abandoned or punished by God. This aspect of spirituality could be conceived as negative in that it represents a lack of a secure and loving relationship with God.

In the study, analysis revealed that faith maturity and spiritual struggle were both useful in explaining unique aspects of growth and positive affect that non-spiritual factors (personality, social support) could not explain. Furthermore the study revealed that the predicted level of positive affect

that one experiences as a result of growth is conditionally based upon the degree of struggle that a person experiences. Said differently, the relationship that one experiences between growth and joy is dependent upon the degree to which one believes that they have been punished or abandoned by God in their trauma. (See Werdel, 2010 for further information.)

While certainly the data presented in the research, combined with the previous research in the field on posttraumatic growth, point to implications for secular mental health professionals, there are very important implications for pastoral counselors, pastoral care workers, chaplains, spiritual directors, and others in ministry who work with the spiritual aspect of people who suffer. The implications may go overlooked by people not familiar with the psychological study of posttraumatic growth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY

The current literature, and specifically, the research of Werdel (2010), highlights four key implications for people who minister to those who suffer.

First, research on posttraumatic growth suggests that spirituality is an aspect of a person's world view that offers unique assistance in the process of meaning-making after stressful life events. Beyond what our personality (as traditionally defined by psychology) and our social relationships can provide for us, spirituality has something more to offer; it has something more to say. Ministers, spiritual directors, pastoral counselors, and other professionals who work with spiritual issues may provide the context to access themes that facilitate healing and growth in ways that other forms of healing professionals may not be trained to do. This highlights the important and unique role that professionals who work with spiritual themes may provide to a person who is suffering.

To provide a uniquely useful role, those who work with people who are suffering must understand a person's lived experience and relationship with God—not the theological tenets, not what one's faith tells a person they

ought to believe or be, though this is useful information for ministers to have for their own professional grounding. However, the faith experience as it manifests in a person's daily life requires ministers to understand more than doctrine. To understand the lived experience of a person requires *empathetic listening*. This form of listening requires putting aside any desire to preach or teach religious thought so that one may enter the experience of the one who is suffering. The experience of suffering is not to be approached as a teachable moment. To do so would serve only to distance the spiritual minister from the person who is suffering, and as such end any possibility of healing and growth. Rather, the work is that of deep listening.

Secondly, one gathers from the research on posttraumatic growth that religion is a place where people turn in times of stress and trauma. However, spirituality should not be assumed to be only positive in nature. Negative relationships with God exist too. Ministers, spiritual directors, and pastoral counselors need to possess the ability to create a space that allows individuals who are suffering to explore the multitude of ways in which spirituality may be relating to their life narrative. Albert Camus wrote, "In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me lay an invincible summer." The research on posttraumatic growth implies that in order for an individual to co-journey with a person who is suffering, one must be comfortable with entering the depths of a person's personal and spiritual winter. While mental health professionals are trained in entering psychological winters, they are not necessarily trained in entering spiritual winters. So then, who will enter the spiritual winter of the one who suffers if not those trained professionals in spiritual ministry? If we are ever to be able to enter another's spiritual winter, we must first acknowledge that they painfully do exist. Negative experiences of God are not merely framed as bad theology and attempted to be altered. They are honored as the reality of the experience of the one who suffers. It is a reality that cannot be erased with the statement that God is love, no matter how true such a statement may be.

The research on posttraumatic growth implies that in order for an individual to co-journey with a person who is suffering, one must be comfortable with entering the depths of a person's personal and spiritual winter.



One way that this may happen is that individuals who are in the role of a spiritual co-journeyer or a spiritual leader may come to explore theodicy with a person—the seemingly contradictory view that evil and suffering exist in the world, as does an all loving, all powerful God. Along this line it may be helpful to consider the work of Cataldo (2008) who presents the psychological concept of multiple self states and functional polytheism. In her argument (which is psychological, not spiritual) she suggests that for each self that exists within a person (e.g., the child in me, the mother in me), there also exists an experience of God. So, in this line, just as Aristotle indicated that we cannot solve a problem with the same system that created it, perhaps we cannot heal a wound with the same experience of God that resonates with it. We need our loving God to communicate with the God that allows suffering to exist. While certainly multiple self-states is the work of trained mental health professionals, helping people grow in comfort with the tension that may exist between two conflicting God images is the work of spiritual ministers.

Thirdly, those in ministry professions should be aware that research on posttraumatic growth and spiritual struggle identifies the strong negative impact that finding negative spiritual meaning has on a person's sense of joy. Research supports that suffering left to itself does not purify the soul (Harrington, 2000). Not everyone experiences growth. And not everyone who acknowledges a relationship with God experiences growth. The negative relationship between spiritual struggle and joy suggests a need for ministers, spiritual directors, and pastoral counselors to increase their skills to identify, explore, and resolve a person's spiritual struggle. Thinking more broadly, an unaddressed spiritual struggle may have negative impacts not only on an individual's sense of spirituality, but also on a religious congregation's overall health, depending upon whether a person has a leadership role within the church community.

Finding our way through the dark and difficult experiences of trauma as it relates to negative spirituality requires us to learn how to develop the skills to

"see in the dark" (Ruffing, 1992). If one is in the role of pastoral counselor, the first step in helping someone to see in the dark is to learn how to hold the night experience. By containing the client's emotional experience, the client may feel more secure to share his or her story. The ability to act as a container serves as an indication to the client that we acknowledge the client's need for a co-journeyer as he or she explores the dark night of the soul experience. The client need not walk alone.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we in healing professions must believe in growth. For as much as we must accept suffering as a reality, so too must we accept growth. Not as a platitude but as an integrated personal experience. To believe in growth does not mean that we demand growth from others. It does not mean that we seek growth from others. It does not even mean that we would necessarily ever even explore growth with people who come to us to tell their story of crisis and pain. To believe in growth means that within us, in our minds and in our hearts, we make space for the possibility that some positive changes may result from the struggle to make meaning in trauma. We hold a sense of hope that we may experience a sense of being afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). To believe in growth is to believe that suffering may not just be one way, but perhaps the only way, we may grow in some regards.

When we, as spiritual professionals, integrate the paradox of suffering and growth into our basic assumptions of how the human psyche can come to heal, we listen to the stories of people differently. When we only seek to understand suffering, we risk depression. When we only seek to understand growth, we risk ignorance. When we can live in the tension between the two, we hear not only the additive experience of suffering and growth, but the multiplicative one. And is this not what it means to be a spiritual person? We find the ability to live in the tension created between the need to feel a sense of groundedness in the present moment and an awareness that even if we live surrounded by our

most comforting material possessions, with people whom we love, and by whom we are loved, while on this earth, we are not yet home. To be a spiritual person is to come to believe that when it comes to a sense of home, we are ever "on our way." Perhaps this is the greatest assumptive belief of the spiritual person. It is a belief that certainly needs care and attention to be met well.

CONCLUSIONS

The cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead, wrote, "We all need someone to worry about us when we don't come home at night." Her words remind us that as independent as our culture influences us to be, we need relationship. Human development, specifically attachment theory, tells us that to be in relationship with another is not just pity; it is not just nice. The development of our emotional lives is dependent upon relationship. We need to know that someone other than our selves hear us and see us. We need to know that there is love beyond the narcissistic tendencies we may (or may not) feel for ourselves.

People in ministry understand that for the spiritual person, the one that we seek relationship with, the one whom we seek to know and who worries for us in this life, is God. For God is the one who best knows that we are not yet there. People in ministry understand that we need to feel God's concern for us, especially in times of crisis. For it is through this relationship that many of us come to find the strength to rise on life's wreckage; it is through this relationship that many of us come to find the hope that allows us to journey on, to journey well; it is through this relationship that many of us endure our suffering and, by it, grow.

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Mary Ellen Dougherty, S.S.N.D.

LESSONS IN Loss

As I move through my seventies, loss is becoming a dominant theme. I fear I am in danger of becoming emotionally numb. As more and more significant things happen to me, I am reacting less and less. In one year, two of my brothers have died, a twenty-five year old grandnephew committed suicide, and two close friends died—one a childhood friend and the other a mentor and friend since college days. Death accumulates. So does grief.

I do not know where all this grief is going. Sometimes I think I am healthily detached, full even, of peace if not equanimity. But then, without apparent cause, there is a surge of grief that leaves me limp. I am not a psychologist; I have never even taken a psychology course. I do not know how to analyze what is happening. I can only address it in terms that I understand.

Recently I watched the short film *Zen Noir*. The main character, a private investigator based on Garrison Keillor's Guy Noir, receives a call that there has been a sudden death at a local Buddhist monastery. He is asked to investigate it. He goes with gun in hand to interview the monks. When he interviews each monk by way of passionate and straightforward questions ("Let's keep this simple," he says, "did you murder him?"), they smile and offer him a cup of tea, or a slice of orange.

At the height of frustration, he complains to the abbot about the unwillingness of the community to cooperate in the murder investigation. The abbot, frustrated with the investigator, quizzes him: was there a wound, or a weapon, or any sign of poison? No. In fact, there is no evidence of foul play. The abbot tells him that the monk was not murdered, he simply died. That happens, he says. It is *Zen Noir* who is complicating this with his assumptions about murder. His frenzy and frustration are a direct result not of the facts, but of his mental constructs around the facts.

In the background of this investigation, the detective, who is haunted by visions of his young and beautiful wife, now deceased, begins a relationship with a woman who is making a long retreat at the monastery. She returns his affection. In and out of memories of his wife, the investigator

learns that the retreatant (Jane) is terminally ill and is at the monastery to deal with the fact of death. The investigator alternately resists and engages until he ultimately surrenders to love.

In the meantime, he seeks the counsel of the abbot, who gently leads him to the still point of acceptance. Death happens. All we have is what we have now, symbolized in the cup of tea and the orange. Relish the tea and the orange. Rejoice in the present. That is all you have.

And that is a lesson for loss. All we have is what we have now. But we do have that.

As I said, I do not know how to analyze what is happening to me because of all this loss, but I have learned over decades in religious life, with steady attention to the spiritual life, that God leads me. But God leads me incrementally. As all I have is what I have now, all I know is what I know now. What I know now as I listen to the quiet escalation of losses in my life is the necessity for three things: attention, simplicity and freedom.

I see the sparrow on my window sill but do not hear his song. I hear the wind in a blizzard but do not see the patterns of snow swirling in the moonlight above the cedar trees. I see the beach but not the fragile bird tracks in the sand, the ocean but not the dolphin rising from it in the sunlight. I smell the coming of rain, but do not hear the soft rhythm of it on the rooftop. I see the maple tree outside my window, but not the subtle nuances of a falling leaf. I am *there* but not wholly there. In all things I am only as present as I am aware, and I am only as aware as I am attentive.

And so it is with loss. Whatever I am experiencing now, I need to experience it, to be in it, and present to it. I need to pay attention to it. Evasion is not an option. At this stage of my life, loss is not a discrete incident, or an accumulation of incidents, measured by mathematical count. Loss is a permeating and permanent reality. Most importantly, it is a reality defined by love. I feel the loss in proportion to how much I have loved. My call as a whole person is to be in the loss and to favor the love that makes the feeling of loss possible. Only by being steeped in attentiveness can I move steadily toward equanimity, an end point for a life in God and a life of God in me.

In my attentiveness, I need to be present to what *is*, not to the constructs I am creating around what is. I need to acknowledge the clean and simple lines of loss. Members of my family and my friends have died. As the abbot tells Zen Noir, that happens. While it is true that personal histories have intersected in sometimes complex ways, and that those intersections are not always easy or clear cut, the matter of death is simple and the feeling of loss is real. That is what I need to acknowledge now. Death and thus loss have happened and I feel it. Pay attention to that, and, at the same time, let it be. When deaths accumulate, receive the accumulation of grief that comes with that. Receive it all and let it be. Do not resist it and do not complicate it. Be in it without being ruled by it. Be aware of what is happening around me and in me. Do not dress it up or down. It is what is, regardless of what my mental constructs want it to be. In this context, simplicity, I have learned, requires freedom.

Recently in returning from three days of business in Florida, I arrived at Baltimore-Washington International airport at five in the evening, and was in my car headed home within a half hour. After an icy rain, it was beginning to snow, a heavy and steady snow. At that time of the evening, in a high volume of traffic, the ride is usually forty-five minutes, an hour at the most. That night it took me eight hours to get home.

Most of that time was spent within three beltway exits, a span of approximately seven miles. The fastest we were able to go at any point was fifteen miles an hour. Most of the time we were sitting still, or skidding, or circumventing abandoned cars. I had with me all I needed for survival, a cheese snack I had purchased in the Miami airport, plenty of gas, a cell phone with frequent contact with the sisters with whom I live, and, for the long periods of waiting, an audio book. As often happens to people in critical situations, I was fully in the moment. I was attentive; I was free of fear or anger or projection. It was what it was. I was forced to pay attention, and graced enough to keep it simple.

When I arrived home at 1:30 in the morning, I could not get down the long driveway to our house and so I left my car in the parking lot of a neighboring

nursing home. As I walked from the nursing home to our house in ten inches of snow and without boots, I was aware of a sense of quiet exhilaration. The night was still, the sky and trees were magnificent, the snow was soft and light underfoot, and I was home.

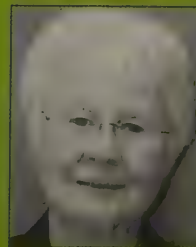
As I reflect on that night, I wish that I could be that fully attentive to every moment, that I could receive what is happening, and most of all, that I could experience that quiet exhilaration and gratitude in the ordinary moments of my life. For in those moments, too, I am home.

All of this requires freedom, a habit of the heart. Freedom, like many habits, comes from practice. And the practice comes from desire and grace, both issuing from a heart disposed to God.

As I speak of freedom here, I mean the interior disposition that first of all (first in the order of occurrence) permits me to accept what is when it is clear that I cannot change it, to accept, for example, the loss in my life. The fact is, that at my age loss is not likely to lessen. Freedom, however, does not preclude sadness or grief. It does, however, preclude resistance or denial. At the farthest reaches of freedom I will not even desire life over death, having over not having. I will desire habitually only to be in the place where God leads me, whether that be the land of loss or the land of love. The distance between acceptance and this absolute purity of desire is probably a lifetime.

And yet I desire to be free, I desire to accept, I desire to let go of my own absolutes and ultimatums. I practice in small ways, not insisting, not *having* to have. Eventually, by dint of discipline and grace, I find that in many everyday things, I am free. Desire and grace, as well as the events of life, especially those events like death which are sources of deep anguish for me, empower me to let go more and more.

And thus I return to my beginning.



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DISCERNING CHOICES

for New Life A Survey of Options

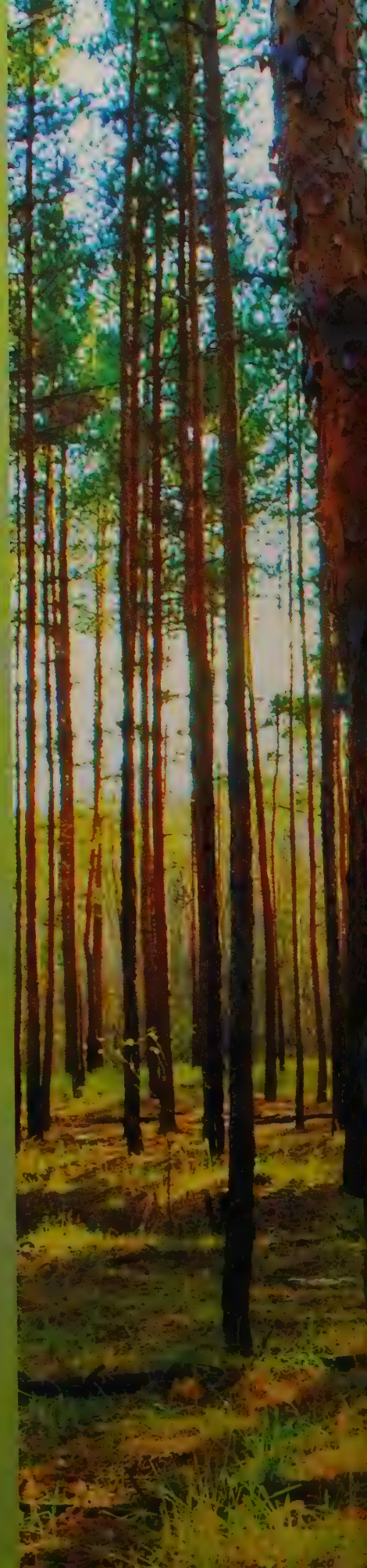
Ted Dunn, Ph.D.

"I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life then, so that you and your descendants may live in the love of Yahweh your God."

—Deuteronomy 30:19–20

Time marches on and religious life in North America continues to undergo profound changes as a result of familiar trends: An inexorable decline in numbers and advancing age of its members, internal shifts in the values that undergird religious life, and the recognition that certain aspects of religious life require adaptation to a rapidly changing world. These pressures take a cumulative toll, making it increasingly difficult for communities to go on as is. When going on as is becomes impossible, the critical question for communities becomes: Which option, of those available, will bring us to new life?

Most authors agree (Chittister 2006, O'Murchu 1998, Wittberg 1996, Couturier 2006) that religious life is in the midst of profound transition and only the most courageous and innovative communities will come through this period to birth a new cycle of religious life. Communities who wish to choose life are exploring their options. Some are choosing *to reconfigure* by joining with other communities of a similar charism through merger, union, federation or alliance. Others are choosing to restructure, changing models of leadership, downsizing and reorganizing their way of life. And still others are choosing refounding, taking that leap of faith into a journey toward transformative possibilities and new paradigms of religious life.





Communities under pressure to change are making the best choices they can with whatever information they have at their disposal. They try to imagine what certain options might do for them and reason through potential pros and cons. They might consult with other communities and find out what they have done when facing similar options. They might hire facilitators and consultants who have been down this road to assist them in creating processes for discerning their future. These are all proactive and worthwhile avenues of investigation.

What communities do not have, however, and what would service them greatly, is sound data upon which to base these critical, life-altering decisions. While there are articles and books that discuss the theory and practice of reconfiguring, restructuring and refounding, most are not written specifically for religious. Of the few that are written for religious, there is a dearth of empirical studies to substantiate these authors' claims. Leaders and members continue to engage in decision-making processes without the benefit of basic information about the options available to them. For example, based upon the experience of communities that have already explored these options:

- What were the desired outcomes and anticipated costs and how did these compare with the actual outcomes?
- What processes did they use when exploring, deciding upon, implementing and evaluating their options and how long did these take?
- What kinds of resistance did they typically encounter and what proved to be the best way of handling this?
- What learnings can be gleaned from those who have traveled these roads and what recommendations might they offer based upon their experiences?

This article provides the results of a national study I conducted from 2008 to 2010 in an effort to explore these kinds of questions and address this basic information gap.

A SURVEY OF OPTIONS

Purpose

The primary purpose of the 2008–2010 study was to provide religious communities with a sound basis of information from which to make critical decisions about their future. The results are summarized here in order to help communities make wise choices regarding their options of reconfiguration, restructuring and refounding based upon:

- Factual pros and cons, rather than imagined hopes and fears;
- Comprehensive empirical data, rather than limited anecdotal information; and
- A basic understanding of the processes related to these options.

Methodology

In order to gather this information an online survey was developed and religious communities from across North America were invited to share their experiences of reconfiguring, restructuring and refounding. Information about the survey was distributed via an email announcement from LCWR to its member congregations. The men's equivalent, CMSM, was invited, but declined to announce the survey; hence, few men's communities responded. The survey consisted of 65 questions (multiple-choice and open ended) pertaining to motivations and expectations, processes and outcomes, as well as learnings and recommendations regarding the three options. Both leaders and members, who were either favorable toward or resistant to their options, were invited to complete the survey in order to obtain a robust appreciation of experiences.

Respondents

One hundred and one people responded to the survey representing some 37 different communities. Nearly all were women's communities (6 were men's communities) from the United States (2 from Canada and 3 from England). While communities varied widely in size (from more than 4,000 to under 50) most communities represented had between 200 and 400 members (enlarged perhaps by reconfigurations). The average age of

membership across all communities was 71.

About half of the survey respondents were leaders and half were members. Despite casting a wide net, however, the vast majority of respondents were favorable toward the desired direction of the community (only 12% were resistant). Most were also on committees implementing the various processes. Because of the respondents' initially favorable attitudes and extensive involvement in the processes, a positive bias in responses would be expected. Further research would be needed in order to take these biases and limitations into account.

In order to examine more closely the processes communities used, questions about process were divided into four phases: (1) Exploration; (2) Decision-Making; (3) Implementation; and (4) Evaluation. At the time of the survey, communities had completed different phases of the process. Ninety-eight percent had completed the initial exploration phase, 80% completed the decision-making phase, 58% completed the implementation phase and 40% had completed the evaluation phase.

Definitions

The following operational definitions were provided to survey respondents:

Reconfiguration joins two or more congregations, typically of a similar charism or founder, in a more comprehensive manner (i.e., forming a new structure). Reconfiguration could involve merger, union, federation or alliance.

Restructuring is an effort made by a community to modify its existing organizational structures in order to better address current realities and their desired way of organizing community. Restructuring efforts might result in downsizing or simplifying existing governance models or creating new governance models (e.g., from hierarchical to circular models of governance).

Refounding is an effort to shift the very paradigm of religious life. It is a decision that springs from the belief that such a radical shift in operating values, prevailing attitudes and normative interpersonal behaviors must take place in order for a community to birth new life into the

future. This could involve processes such as: reconciliation and conversion; transformative visioning; creating a new consciousness, re-authentication of a community's inner voice; learning new ways to live community and carrying out its mission (Dunn 2009).

Definitions were more thoroughly described in the survey itself. The complete survey and information is available at www.cccsstlouis.com.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND CHOSEN

Of the three options, 54% of the communities that responded initially considered reconfiguring, 43% restructuring and 34% considered refounding. Of those who had reached a decision 33% chose reconfiguring, 31% chose restructuring and 31% chose refounding as the direction to take.

From the data collected it could not be determined why communities chose one particular option over another. The reasons a community gave for choosing a particular option (e.g., refounding over restructuring) were often the very same reasons given by another community for choosing a different option (e.g., restructuring over reconfiguring). Hence, the reasons behind these choices appear common to all, rather than option-specific.

Success Rates

Respondents were asked to rate the degree of success in both their community's decision-making and implementation efforts along a five-point scale across different dimensions of success. The overall success rate for both reaching a decision and implementing these decisions was quite high. Nearly 90% reported either a high or moderate degree of success across the various dimensions for both of these phases.

Success in the decision-making phase was defined along six dimensions: (1) Members were fully informed; (2) at peace; (3) experienced ownership and involvement; (4) reached a consensus; (5) had a collaborative and cooperative spirit; and (6) made a wise choice. Across all six dimensions nearly half of the respondents indicated a high degree of success and another third

indicated moderate success. The most challenging aspects appeared to be in reaching a decision peacefully as only 23% reported a high degree of success on this dimension.

Success in the implementation phase was defined as: (1) Members were fully informed; (2) worked through conflicts, differences and points of confusion; (3) experienced ownership and involvement; (4) had a collaborative and cooperative spirit; and (5) met their goals and objectives in a timely manner and with a high degree of quality. Results indicated that across all five dimensions, just under 50% of the respondents indicated a moderate degree of success while another 40% indicated high success. The most challenging aspects appeared to be the ability to work through conflicts, differences and points of confusion as only 32% reported a high degree of success.

Process Durations

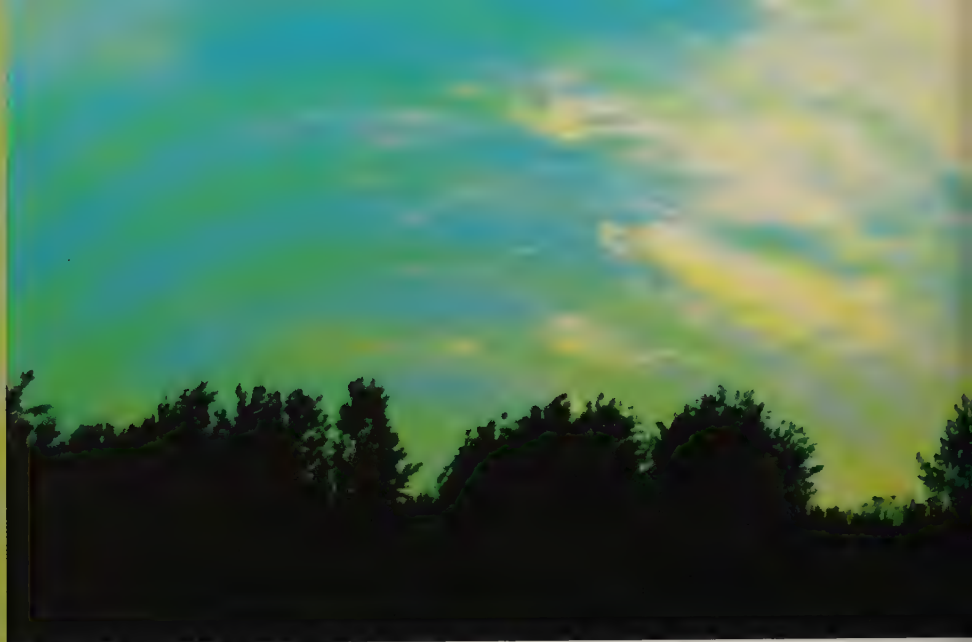
It took nearly a decade on average for communities to complete their entire journey. It took an average of 3 to 4 years to complete the exploration phase, 2 years for the decision-making phase, 3 years for the implementation phase and another year for the evaluation phase. This decade of work does not take into account all of the preliminary conversations that leadership or committees may have had prior to starting serious community-wide explorations. Nor does it account for the ongoing cycle of implementation-evaluation-modification that inevitably follows any initial evaluation.

Motivations

What brings communities to the crossroads of these life and death choices? According to the respondents the reasons given for all three options were similar. When asked to indicate the initial impetus for exploring the possibilities of reconfiguration, restructuring or refounding the following results were obtained:

1. 63% indicated a limited number of members were available for leadership and other internal ministries;
2. 46% referenced their diminishing numbers and

Communities under pressure to change are making the best choices they can with whatever information they have at their disposal.



What seems to sustain motivation over time, however, is an internal desire to proactively choose life for the sake of mission and community.

advancing age adversely affecting their ability to care for members and carry on their mission;

3. 36% referenced a difficulty in financially caring for members and carrying out their mission;
4. 29% had an invitation by another community to reconfigure;
5. 19% said their existing model of governance no longer fit their realities or contemporary understandings of their vows and values.

There was no single event that triggered the exploration of a particular option. Rather, the initial reasons seemed to be many and varied across communities. Most respondents named the tipping point in terms of a crisis of leadership, vocations or finances or some combination of these. The bottom line, as one person said, "We could no longer meet the needs of God's people."

In addition, the reasons seemed to evolve over the course of time. It appears that what initially pushes communities toward new options is a response to changing realities of one kind or another (e.g., financial struggle, shrinking pool of leadership, advancing age, declining numbers). What seems to sustain motivation over time, however, is an internal desire to proactively choose life for the sake of mission and community

(especially for younger members). Communities want to be proactive in shaping their future. They want to enkindle a new spirit in their charism and mission. They are seeking a conversion of their collective soul (i.e., *metanoia*).


EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

What Are Communities Seeking?

What are the desired outcomes of communities engaging such change efforts? What specifically do they hope will happen as a result of pursuing any of these options? The common themes for all three options were choosing life, strengthening mission and renewing relationships.

Overall, communities are trying to somehow renew and revitalize the life they are living. As one person said, "We didn't look at what we would gain, we simply wanted new energy and hope." Another said, "We wanted each member to take ownership and work together, more effectively in service of church and mission. We hoped to achieve a fidelity to God in service of the people to whom we minister; to come to a better understanding of what our future could hold for us; to open our minds and hearts to explore options we had not explored."

Others focused specifically on mission and spoke of it this way, "We hoped to strengthen our mission and preserve our charism for future generations." Unique to reconfiguration was a



desire to gain strength in numbers, "We'd be better together than apart." They wished to become one voice believing, "We would have greater advocacy and political power if we came together as one congregation." Another said, "We wanted to combine resources to make a difference in our world today." One person lamented, however, saying, "We said it was for the sake of mission, though no one could articulate what that meant."

Among those emphasizing relationships there was a strong desire to build trust and to become more open and honest with each other. Some wanted to "deepen our values and vows," viewing these as the foundation of their relationships. Many hoped to "free up leaders to participate in ministry," and "reduce the number in leadership." Others wished to relate in a less hierarchical manner and become more interdependent.

Greatest Benefits

What specific benefits resulted from all of their efforts and did this match their original expectations? In many respects communities did achieve what they had hoped to achieve regarding the themes of new energy for mission and community, and a renewed sense of hope for the future. Clearly communities were strengthened by the options they pursued. The most important benefits clustered around the following seven areas:

Hope for the future: The promise of new life was claimed with a "new spirit, energy and hope for the future." There was a renewed appreciation of the abundant blessings of life and determination to go forward.

New perspectives: There was recognition of new horizons and broader perspectives on mission. "It broadened our thinking, gave us a new understanding and a more global vision." "We now have seeds of new life for a new vision." "It made us rethink the reason we entered religious life."

New sense of home: Communities have found new friends and claimed a new sense of home. They have deepened their appreciation, respect, trust and understanding of one another. There is a greater degree of closeness, inclusiveness and belonging. "We are rediscovering and growing to care for one another again."

Stronger partnership: Members have gained a sense of "being-in-it-together." There is greater interdependence, partnership and a growing sense of solidarity and unity amidst diversity. There is a greater sense of shared mission ("I am an integral part of the whole") and stronger common heart. "Those who were on the fringe are now more engaged and volunteer for committees and leadership."

Greater ownership: "This is now our community." There is more ownership because of more voices and participation in the process. As result, there is more passion, energy and pride. **Stronger identity:** There is a clearer

sense of "identity and who we are as a community." In addition, there is a clearer sense of charism and mission.

Deepening faith: "We have been faithful to the journey and become more spiritually acquainted." "We can truly say we lived the Paschal Mystery of dying and rising and this has made us strong in facing the continued transition of religious life. God is leading us to new life."

Greatest Costs

What did it cost communities for the benefits they received? By far the most common tangible costs were time, money and energy, especially for travel and meetings. Added to these costs, however, were the costs of accountants, lawyers, facilitators and consultants of all kinds. And many struggled with this cost because these "resources could have been spent on mission."

The less tangible costs, however, proved just as burdensome. There was the emotional toll of generalized fear and anxiety because of "not knowing where all this is leading us" and "risking with no guarantees." There was the pain of divisions, conflict and disengagement by "those who wanted to take different directions." For some there was a strong fear of splitting and camps were formed between "us and them." There was pain in "facing the reality of who we are and our own limitations."

For most there was grieving of one kind or another. There was letting go of the "way things have always been"

and the “way we’ve always done things.” For nearly all there was some kind of death and dying. As one conveyed it, “Our grieving is about facing the reality of who we are and that change is essential if the community is to live on.” For those reconfiguring there was a loss of intimacy that had come with their smallness.

Another cost often mentioned was the unearthing of old wounds and the struggle toward reconciliation. For example, “Anyone who has emotional baggage from the past did not handle the process well, especially those who had questions about religious vocation. It seemed to bring up all their personal insecurities.”

Was It Worth It?

Were the benefits worth the costs? While there is no simple way to answer this question, as a general gauge respondents were asked to rate the degree to which their community’s desired expectations and fears were realized along with their overall levels of satisfaction.

To what degree were these expectations realized?

Across all respondents, 19% said their community’s expectations were completely realized, 49% said these were fairly well realized, 20% said somewhat

and 12% said little or not at all. When asked if their initial fears actually came true, for the most part the answer was very little or not at all: The majority (60%) said not much or somewhat, 20% said not at all and only 12% said that yes they did. Regarding the level of overall satisfaction by the members with results of all their efforts: 9% reported very high levels of satisfaction, 46% high, 45% neutral or less.

LEARNINGS ABOUT PROCESS

What Part of the Process Was Most Helpful?

Although different processes were used in pursuing differing options, an attempt was made to glean what helped in their approach to process. The most common learnings centered around the themes of: involvement, information, communication, prayer, process design and the use of outside assistance.

Relationships: *Relate, involve, engage* were the key words. This translates into gatherings of all kinds: Local community meetings, congregational meetings as well as inter-congregational meetings. The involvement of grassroots membership and leadership at all levels was repeatedly stated as important. Cross-pollination of groupings and personal engagement were critically important. Some referenced pen pals and prayer partners as a way to

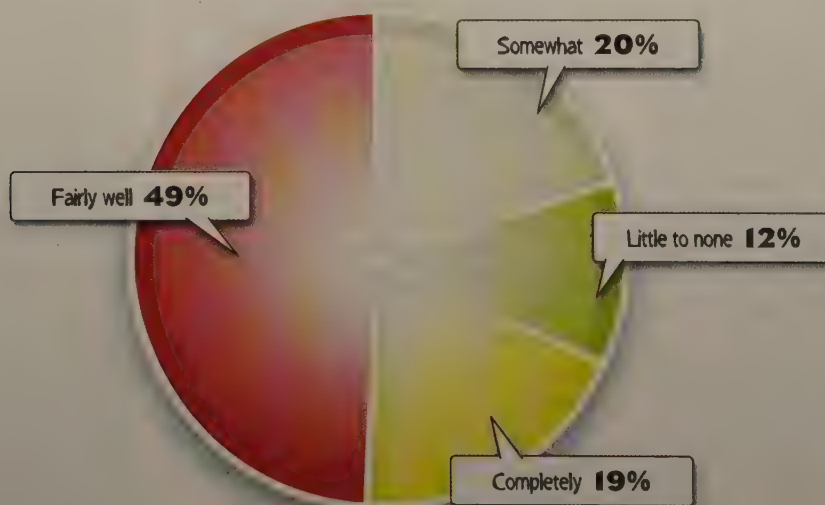
engage, but nothing seemed to replace face-to-face conversations. Total inclusivity and involvement were the ingredients that led to ownership and passion for the process.

Communication: “Communicate, communicate, communicate!” Clear and constant communication was emphasized. The use of newsletters, websites, letters, and emails from committees, leadership and members in order to keep everyone in the loop was essential. The use of articles, DVDs, CDs and booklets were all helpful tools. Providing clear and timely information was stressed.

Education and Information: Education was also key. “Look at all of the options and understand what these might mean.” Knowing the pros and cons, basic facts and terminology (e.g., merger, refounding, circular models) about the options was important. Helping members understand the process and the steps that were involved was important. There was an emphasis also on total transparency, “putting all of the cards on the table,” regarding finances, formation, health, ministry, retirement and demographics.

Prayer and Discernment: Respondents were asked specifically about the degree to which they used communal discernment to assist their community in reaching a decision. Each and every respondent reported

Realized Expectations



that communal discernment was used. Sixty-three percent used it extensively and 32% reported having used it moderately. Prayer, ritual and contemplative dialogue were valuable components throughout the process, especially for decision-making.

Process: The design and implementation of process was also seen as significant. Consistency and continuity of the process were important along with using new approaches (e.g., U-theory). Reflection booklets and keeping journals were noted as helpful. The development of possible future scenarios was useful. "Introversion time" so that members could assimilate information was just as important as active listening and conversation. The use of straw votes and consensus testing was noted as helpful in moving toward decisions.

Outside Assistance: The use of canon lawyers to educate members on the options and legal parameters was important. Nearly all communities relied upon outside facilitation to assist in designing and implementing the process. This was particularly helpful in ensuring that conversations at assemblies did not break down when tensions emerged. Training the community in skills of dialogue was also seen as important.

What Part of the Process Was the Greatest Challenge?

Respondents were asked what they found as challenging or problematic in the processes they used. There were many reported challenges and most fell within the following five categories.

Facing the Fear: As one put it, "fear was a constant companion." Numerous fears were mentioned. Topping the list, however, was a general fear of the unknown. There were also fears of failure or of making a wrong choice resulting in bad outcomes. There were fears of the community splitting or becoming separated as a result of the process. There was also considerable fear regarding the financial impact of their efforts. A fear expressed widely among those pursuing reconfiguration was loss of identity. For the elders facing reconfiguration, there were specific fears about where they would retire or be buried.

Mistrust: Related to the fear perhaps were concerns regarding trust. Mistrust emerged between leaders and members of the same congregation as well as between different congregations or provinces involved in reconfiguring. Concerns were expressed here about withholding or distorting information. Some reported that members repeatedly stated that it was a "done deal" and that leadership had already made up their minds, despite efforts to prove otherwise. They didn't trust that their voice mattered or would influence leadership.

Differential Commitment, Involvement and Pace: Another common struggle was getting everyone on board, involved and committed at the same time. For example, "Difficulties surfaced when all provincial leaders did not have the same level of commitment to reconfiguration as the process continued." For some the process was too slow and dragged on, while for others it was too fast and there was not enough time to assimilate material. What made this even more frustrating was that some members chose to opt out of the process while at the same time complaining about being left behind or not kept abreast.

Limits of Time and Space: Time limits placed upon members because of calendared processes (or particular needs of another congregation in the case of reconfiguring) were a struggle for many. Yet, carving out the time to meet, travel and keep up with material was a tremendous challenge regardless of deadlines and limits. For those communities involved in reconfiguring, the geographical dispersion added to the complexity of coordinating communications, meetings and moving along together in the process.

What Was the Nature of the Resistance?

In order to hone in specifically on how groups addressed some of these challenges, the survey asked specifically about resistance (i.e., dynamics opposing the process). So, what was the primary nature of the resistance they faced? The resistance emerged along a continuum from denial, to refusal to change, to outright subversive opposition.

Prayer, ritual and contemplative dialogue were valuable components throughout the process, especially for decision-making.

The most common approach for handling resistance was constant communication and total engagement.

Denial and Foot-dragging: A number of behaviors were reported that evidenced a softer kind of resistance. Some believed that whatever changes took place would not touch their daily life (e.g., "We'll still have ice-cream on Wednesdays"). Some observed foot-dragging on the part of those who did not want to deal with potential changes (e.g., "It looked like someone attempting to assist an elderly person across the street who didn't really want to go"). Some wanted to "keep all options open" and "leave it to God" to the point of avoiding any personal responsibility for making the decision.

Refusing to Change: A more direct expression of resistance was evidenced by those who refused to let go, change or participate in the process. They refused to come to meetings, listen, engage in conversations or view things from another's perspective. In a nutshell, "They simply refused to budge."

Subversive Opposition: Those labeled as the strong opposition or power people were often the ones who missed important meetings. Yet, when present, these same people protested loudly against the efforts. They seemed to "sow seeds of discontentment" and induce side-taking, divided loyalties and we/they camps. One leader said, "Many times the resistance was subversive and secretive. They published distorted facts and dire consequences. Pressure was put on the most vulnerable among us (e.g., elders and those for whom English is a second language)."

How Was the Resistance Addressed?

Given these various expressions of resistance, how did communities attempt to handle it and how did this work out?

Talking It Through: The most common approach for handling resistance was constant communication and total engagement. People needed a place to have open and honest discussions and express their feelings. Conversations and feedback were frequent and ongoing occurrences. Beyond the assemblies, committee members and leadership often met personally with those expressing resistance.

One respondent summed up these efforts by saying, "being transparent as possible and not shying away from the questions."

Time for Prayer and Going Inward: The use of prayer and ritual throughout the gatherings was cited as a key way of working through resistance. People needed time to go inward and assimilate. They needed to be brought "back to God" in both personal and communal discernment. They were constantly reminded of the need for patience, that the process was a journey of faith and that they were discerning a response to God's call.

Offering Abundant Information: Appealing to reason was also important. As such, an abundance of information and frequent clarifications to questions was offered along the way. The use of DVDs, booklets, letters addressing frequently asked questions, outside speakers and the like were noted. One group used specific committees formed for the expressed purpose of exploring differing aspects of potential resistance. For example, a committee was formed specifically to look at loss, another to explore transformation.

Outside Assistance: In order to foster safety, encourage honesty and skillfully work through challenging conversations many respondents cited the need for outside facilitation. "We had a facilitator who helped us address the issue and speak to one another with respect and understanding." One respondent said, "The facilitator helped us see resistance as a piece of information. Because of the questions raised by the community, the committee began to explore other options that the community could consider."

Success in Working Through

Respondents were asked to rate the overall level of success in working through resistance. A successful approach was defined as one that incorporated the wisdom of those who were resistant while successfully maintaining a collaborative, cooperative partnership among all members.

The data here is somewhat mixed. Most (70%) reported a high or moderate degree of success in working through resistance, while 25% reported

only partial success. Only 5% reported that their efforts to work through resistance actually made things worse. There were a number of comments indicating that resistance was not addressed (e.g., "I'm not sure we really worked through resistance"). An encouraging trend was that resistance was strongest in the beginning phases and climaxed leading up to a decision. Once a decision was made and implementation began, much of the resistance abated.

Myths and Misunderstandings: Respondents were asked to identify the most important myths or misunderstandings about the options, processes and outcomes. Myths common to all three options were that these would somehow solve the very problems that brought them to explore new options in the first place. These problems were, in fact, not solved:

Aging and Diminishment: "What I have learned is that it doesn't solve the problem of an aging community. We are still dying, but we have a lot more energy and vitality in our last years."

Shrinking Pool of Leadership: "In the new congregation, the pool of leadership, in terms of 'ratio,' was smaller than our small pool."

Ministry Options: "Members are not as willing as we imagined to move to ministries across the provinces. It did not free up personnel to earn a salary in other ministries."

By far the most common myth related to smaller communities engaged

in reconfiguring was that it would result in their being swallowed up, losing their identity or culture. Many were afraid of losing their voice and personal freedoms (e.g., lifestyle, residence, ministry choices). Apparently, for the most part, these fears did not become a reality.

Another myth or misunderstanding was that there is a definite endpoint wherein efforts to pursue these options would come to completion. "The myth was that once the leadership took over, the merger took place. We are still merging and learning how to do this respectful of our goals, similarities and differences." "The myth was that we could refound and it would all be over. And once we did that, then all our problems would be solved." Regarding a restructuring effort, it was said, "We are still living into these changes."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Respondents were asked to offer recommendations based upon their experiences of reconfiguring, restructuring and refounding. The following are the top ten recommendations that emerged.

1. Involve everyone: There is no way around it. Ownership and passion come from involvement. "The involvement of as many members as possible in committees, in consultations and in gathering were all important." Leaders and members must fully commit to the work at "every phase of the process, no matter the cost."

2. Be utterly honest, fully informed and explore all options: Keep people repeatedly informed and communicate the same information at the same time. Challenge distortions, put all cards on the table and be utterly transparent. Understand the process, your options and hoped-for outcomes. Ask and address the hard questions, examine the pros and cons and "don't be afraid to go over and over the same material until the majority are on board."

3. Do the soul work: Appreciate these efforts as a communal faith journey and do the personal and collective soul work required in such a journey. Do this substantively, concretely and relationally and not by over-spiritualizing or avoiding the depth and honesty required. Encourage this through communal discernment, contemplative dialogue and theological reflection while being vulnerable, real and honest at the same time.

4. Do the relationship work: Connected to this soul work is the work of strengthening relationships: Reconciling what is broken, grieving the losses, celebrating the gifts, embracing the diversity in both its tension and richness, understanding what is not yet understood, and letting come what is yet to be born. Members must get to know each other anew and learn to share power with mutuality and respect. As one put it, "Handle the human issues first and the canonical and legal issues will fall in place."



5. Keep your eye on the prize: Look at the big picture: God, mission and a journey of faith for the community as a whole. "Be faithful to the process you put in place and keep a broad perspective." "Trust that the Holy Spirit is working and know that some will never get on board." "Love them as God loves you in your grieving and letting go."

6. Be patient with God's time: Any path of deep change is hard work and is only done in God's time. Such kairos time cannot be rushed. Be patient with the process and challenge the need for closure. It takes time to absorb and work through emotions, work through resistance. Everyone enters at a different pace. "There is not an endpoint at which time the process is complete. It is ongoing, unfolding and future question will arise that require more decisions." "If we stop and think we have accomplished it all, we are fooling ourselves."

7. Respect differences and work through conflicts: Stay in the struggle to engage your differences or conflicts. This is the work of change. "Don't discard anyone or anything." "Listen to the opposition without judgment" "Create an atmosphere of experimentation. There is no failure, just more information that gives further direction." "Listen to and respect differences and divergence."

8. Seek assistance: Use outside facilitators experienced in these issues. "The facilitator is key. You need folks who are bright, agile and know how to design a process." Seek assistance from spiritual leaders, canon lawyers and consultants. "Bring in the smartest, best people you can." Get help with learning about resistance, the gifts it can offer and how to work through it.

9. Willingly pay the price: To succeed in these endeavors there must be an all out commitment by leaders and members alike. This requires a willingness to spend the necessary time, money and energy. Do not do the minimum or you will pay even more down the road. The price also includes a willingness to struggle with the accompanying fears, conflicts and anxiety. These are inevitable costs of any successful endeavor to attain deep, lasting and systemic change.

10. Seek transformation: No matter what option is chosen, transformative change must be more than ornamental or structural. Deep change involves transformation, conversion and a radical departure from what has been. In order for reconfiguration, restructuring or refounding to result in meaningful, lasting and systemic change, commit to the work of transformation at all levels: personally, in local communities and as an entire congregation or province.

CONCLUSION

Reconfiguration, restructuring and refounding are all viable options for communities discerning God's call to choose life. It is essential to understand, however, that success in choosing any one of these options is dependent upon the work that is also done with the other two. For example, reconfiguring must also include restructuring as well as the deeper work of refounding; otherwise, the transformation needed to birth new life will not occur. All three, in other words, are interconnected and to focus upon one to the exclusion of the others would be a grave mistake.

Hopefully, the lessons from those who have gone before will assist those who have yet to begin such journeys. As one who has gone before summed it up: "It seems that in the end what is important is that members have grown in self-awareness, choosing to be part of a group for the sake of building the reign of God. It is the individual and group transformation which results from entering the Paschal Mystery that is the real achievement."

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish thank all who responded to the survey for your willingness to reflect upon your experiences and share these with others. I wish to thank the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament of Victoria, Texas, who helped initiate this survey. I also wish to thank LCWR for helping this study become a nationwide effort. It is my hope and prayer that the results of this study will assist communities facing the profound opportunities to shape the future of religious life.

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Why Are So Many So Misinformed

NINE YEARS AFTER THE CLERGY ABUSE CRISIS IN AMERICA?

Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D.



As we approach the tenth anniversary of the January 6, 2002 *Boston Globe* investigative report on clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, it is remarkable how misinformed many people still are about this issue. Catholics and non-Catholics alike often seem oblivious to basic factual information about clergy sexual abuse and so often maintain beliefs, opinions, and attributions that are clearly not supported by the best and current available research. So many people are still misguided even after countless quality reports have been published. In my view, the following are the five most common erroneous and unsupported attributions about the clergy sexual abuse problem in the Catholic Church.

Myth 1. Catholic priests are much more likely to be child abusers than other male clergy or men in general.

According to the best available data from the 2004 comprehensive report by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, as well as other research investigations, 4% of Catholic clergy in the United States sexually victimized minors between 1950 and 2002. No credible research evidence has been published at this time that can claim that this 4% figure is significantly higher than clergy from other faith traditions or from the general population of men. The 4% figure is certainly lower than for public school teachers (at 5% to 7%) during similar time frames according to government and other reports. Additionally, the 4% figure is also certainly lower than the number of sex offenders among the general population of men. Since quality research from a variety of sources report that about 17% of American women and 12% of American men were sexually violated when they were children by an adult, the percentage of men who sexually victimize children in the general population has to be much larger than 4%. Sadly and tragically, the sexual violation of children was fairly common during the last half of the twentieth century in the United States and elsewhere. Fortunately, these numbers have been dropping dramatically among the general population as well as within the clergy population since the mid 1980s.

Myth 2. The sexual abuse problem in the Catholic Church is due to celibacy.

If Catholic clergy aren't more likely to be sex offenders than other clergy or men in general, then how can celibacy be the smoking gun? Certainly most sex offenders are not celibate clergy. In fact most are married or partnered. Additionally, men who don't have sex for whatever reasons such as the inability to attract a suitable partner, medical disability, or relationship distress generally don't turn to young children for sexual gratification. Rather, they turn to other consenting adults, adult prostitutes, masturbation, or pornography. The choice to sexually violate a minor child isn't related to not having an adult sexual partner.

Myth 3. Catholic clergy sex offenders are pedophiles.

Actually, research from the 2004 John Jay study and other studies clearly indicates that about 80% of clergy sex offenders are not pedophiles at all. Rather, they have abused post-pubescent teens and not pre-pubescent children. So, the phrase "pedophile priest" is a misnomer. While people may be worried about young children being victimized by Catholic clergy, the more likely victim has been the teen. Pedophilia, even among clergy offenders, is rare.

Myth 4. The sexual abuse problem in the Catholic Church is the fault of gay priests.

We know that the majority of victims of Catholic clergy sexual victimization are boys (80% according to the 2004 John Jay report as well as other research studies). Additionally, we know that the Catholic Church has a number of priests who are

homosexual in orientation (22% to 45% according to different research reports). However, no evidence exists that suggests that sexual orientation, by itself, contributes to sex crimes against children. Homosexual men, by definition, are attracted to other men, not children. The research on this issue has been carefully reviewed and considered by all of the major health and mental health professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. All have concluded that homosexuality is not a risk factor for sex crimes against children.

Myth 5. The Catholic Church is still not a safe place for children.

Almost all of the cases discussed in the press are from the 1960s through early 1980s. Again, the 2004 John Jay study clearly found that cases of sexual abuse by priests decreased dramatically starting in the early to mid 1980s. Curiously, this is also true for other offending groups such as school teachers. Since the crisis of 2002, the incidence of clergy abuse in the United States is extremely rare with a few cases emerging each year. Additionally, most of the more recent cases are from international priests who were born, formed, trained and ordained overseas. They usually did not go through the screening and training process that those trained in the United States have now experienced.

Since 2002 and the now famous Dallas Charter, the church has maintained a zero-tolerance policy such that all credible cases of child abuse are reported to civil authorities, are internally investigated, and presented to a local review board of mostly laypersons. Additionally, those clergy found to have credible accusations are permanently removed from ministry and can never present themselves to the public as a priest. Additionally, all church workers (including volunteers and even parents) must go through regular safe environment training for child protection and all dioceses (with a few rare exceptions) are audited each year by an independent and secular auditing firm to be sure they are in compliance with the rules of the Dallas Charter. Of course, individual bishops can still choose to follow the Dallas Charter or not, but almost all do. In a nutshell, children are certainly as safe as they can be in the Catholic Church today and certainly no other large religious or secular organization currently maintains this level of protection for children in 2011.

Why are so many so misinformed?

So why does the public seem unable to absorb this basic information? Why do Catholics and non-Catholics alike seem to insist on ignoring the available evidence? While I do not know for sure, what does seem to be true is that many people (both Catholics and non-Catholics alike) are outraged with the Catholic Church (and perhaps most especially with the leadership including bishops, cardinals, and the pope) whom they believe have been defensive, arrogant and out of touch. People demand responsibility and accountability and they don't see it happening in the church since leaders who have made bad decisions in the past have not resigned or been fired.



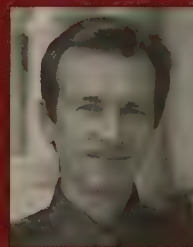
Additionally, the church's often very unpopular positions on sexual ethics (e.g., masturbation, contraception, homosexuality, divorce) make sex crimes committed by priests even more outrageous, scandalous and hypocritical. Furthermore, the otherworldliness and medieval feel of the Catholic Church also makes the story of child sexual abuse committed by priests of great interest to the media and to the general population. In my experience, many of the people who are the most outraged with the church and often provide the strongest opinions about what the church should and shouldn't do are those who have never even been inside of a Catholic church and are neither an abuse victim nor the loved ones of abuse victims. As young people often say, what's up with that?

Remarkably, 149 priests committed almost a third of all clergy abuse sexual violations from 1950 to 2002 (again, according to the 2004 John Jay report). These cases are especially egregious, outrageous and have dominated the press. They have made the church (and the local bishops or religious superiors in charge of supervising these men) look very bad indeed. What the public doesn't seem to understand is that these distressing cases were the exception and not the rule in terms of abusers and that these cases got way out of control. Perhaps this is mostly due to the lack of checks and balances in the Catholic Church relative to many other organizations, and to other factors unrelated to the church (e.g., recommendations of mental health professionals, lack of interest from law enforcement, and the cultural times).

Many reasonable and thoughtful people want the Catholic Church to change in a wide variety of ways to suit their views and needs. For example, many from the left believe that married men, women, and those who are homosexual should be able to be ordained as priests and deacons (as the Episcopal Church does in many locations). Others really don't like organized

religion at all and especially dislike the Catholic Church for all sorts of reasons (e.g., telling people how they should live their lives, the Crusades, how they treated Galileo, the medieval style outfits worn by Vatican leaders). Yet the current, best-quality research data on clergy abuse in the Catholic Church just doesn't seem to support the five prevailing views noted above.

These attributions simply defy reason, logic, and the best available data. We all may have particular beliefs and perspectives about the causes, contexts, nature, and scope of clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, but we should be informed by empirical data, logic and reason rather than emotion. As we approach the tenth anniversary of the clergy sexual abuse crisis in America, may we open our eyes to understand the true context of the problem so we can work to end clergy abuse.



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Michael H. Crosby, O.F.M. Cap.

IS CELIBACY THE MAIN REASON FOR THE LACK OF VOCATIONS?



I believe one simple reason explains why fewer candidates now are joining (non-clerical) men's and women's Religious congregations in the United States, Canada and other economically developed countries. When one looks at demographics from these nations, the lack of vocations to such groups ultimately points to one key issue: celibacy. Simply stated, unlike in pre-Vatican II days, the average person desiring to prayerfully serve God in some kind of permanent ministry can do so without being celibate.

This represents a relatively new phenomenon in the Roman Catholic Church, and its influence on young people's conscious and unconscious decision-making involving celibacy is not being considered to the degree it

should. When the question of why communities of religious sisters and brothers are not getting vocations is asked, celibacy often ends up being the unaddressed "elephant in the room," even if investigations of women religious in the U.S. and Ireland imply the rationale lies somewhere else.

My experience of fifty-plus years as a Capuchin Franciscan reveals that celibacy was the stated reason why such large numbers of priests, brothers and sisters left religious life in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Furthermore, at least in economically developed countries like the U.S., I believe it will remain the main reason why congregations of women and men founded since the French Revolution will continue aging, with fewer and

fewer vocations. As I noted in my opening paragraph, those who would have been candidates for religious life in the past now are finding groups with whom they can pray and minister without remaining celibate for the rest of their lives. As the saying goes vis-à-vis ministry and celibacy, now they can have their cake and eat it too.

In the past I have written on mandated celibacy, especially among men. In this article I want to discuss the celibacy-based reasons that non-clerical groups of women and men religious in economically developed nations will not witness any upswing in vocations for the foreseeable future, if ever. I base my conclusions on various factors: scriptural, theological, cultural and practical.



1. THERE IS NO CLEAR SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION FOR ANY CALL TO CELIBACY.

—No less a scripture authority than St. Paul himself declared that, when it came to any follower of Christ remaining a virgin, he had “no command of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:25). Furthermore, in giving his opinion on the matter, his conclusion was based on a faulty assumption: that the parousia was imminent. For this reason, he argued, people should be intent on preparing for Christ’s return rather than being preoccupied with relational dynamics around marriage.

A second key scriptural passage traditionally used as a rationale for celibacy in the church comes from Matthew 19. The context is Jesus’

teaching on divorce and adultery. One interpretation of “making oneself a eunuch” is that it refers to the party cast off in a divorce. Assuming the marriage was valid, we can interpret that difficult passage to say that such people cannot remarry, and hence, they “make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom.” Indeed this passage remains the key scriptural argument as to why the Roman Church insists that only if a marriage is determined to be invalid can either party be free to remarry.

Without a clear evangelical call to religious life in its present celibate expression, some have stressed the notion of celibacy as a charism in the church. But, again, there is no mention of celibacy in the scriptures where charisms are discussed (such as Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12).

If one is open (as am I) to a “broader” interpretation of scripture, one can find a basis for celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7 (“preoccupation with the coming of the Lord”) and Matthew 19 (“making oneself a eunuch for the kingdom”). However, this can never be done from a sense that this way of being celibate is somehow better than others; it should honestly acknowledge the historical fact that celibacy at the time of Jesus had no value in itself except when practiced temporarily. Even then it was discussed as something done by men. Thus soldiers and priests were to refrain from sexual activity before battle and before offering the sacrifice. As to celibacy in the way it is applied to religious today, Paul reiterates that there is “no command from the Lord.”

Simply put, celibacy in the permanent form it has taken in religious congregations has no solid scriptural basis.

Other efforts to point to the scriptures in support of permanent celibacy cannot be sustained, including the argument from silence that Jesus was a celibate, although I believe this to be the case. What he may have accepted or even embraced for himself was not something he considered important enough to be promoted for some others in any way. Furthermore, the “giving up father and mother and children” passage (Mark 10:29-30) that some have applied to celibacy refers to *discipleship*, not a sexual/genital relationship. Recall that Peter himself, who “left all” to follow Jesus, never left his wife.

Simply put, celibacy in the permanent form it has taken in religious congregations has no solid scriptural basis. Indeed to be celibate was not normal; thus it never was normative, much less made a norm in scripture. It has meaning only in an applied sense (which I accept).

The basic reason as to why celibacy is not normal comes from a definite scriptural assumption: “It is not good... to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). It is not without reason that, given this tradition stressing marriage for all women, that Jephthah’s daughter, knowing her impending death, went into the desert to “bewail” her virginity (Judges 11:37).

2. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR CELIBACY IS WEAK.

From the earliest days of the church, evidence reveals that individual women were called virgins and widows. The data whether they may (or may not) have remained so *permanently* are disputed. In addition, especially with the rise of the third-century cenobitical groups do we find highlighted a communal dimension to celibacy, and when it appears, most often this communal expression involves men, although we do find some *ammās* along with the *abbas*.

As religious life evolved, especially in the non-cloistered, apostolic form that arose in the 1500s, two main theological assumptions buttressed its appeal to potential candidates, especially women. Besides being free of the direct day-to-day dictates of a man, such women could

serve God apostolically, convinced that such apostolic service made them unique among other women. This assumption—once again being resurrected by traditionalist groups in the church—has little theological currency.

Any theology distinguishing between the communally celibate expression of baptism and that of any other baptized Catholic was dissipated by two key teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Before the Council, in the eyes of many, priesthood was considered better than the lay state and celibacy was better than marriage. Such notions were set aside by *Lumen Gentium*’s universal call to holiness. The idea of various vocational states of perfection was rejected. There is one call to holiness for all. (Given this, it is interesting to listen to recent discussions in more conservative circles about various “states” in life; such talk seems to represent a hankering for the earlier ideology and practices connected to the “states of perfection”).

The second factor arising from Vatican II involved the theological understanding that, rather than a call to some to a certain apostolate in the church, baptism itself became recognized as the one call to witness to the Gospel with many apostolic expressions—male and female, single and married, celibate and non-celibate. Now all baptized persons are called to witness to the gospel in whatever they do.

3. THE WIDER CULTURAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR CELIBACY ARE WEAKENING, IF NOT ALREADY GONE.

In many countries, including the United States and Canada, until the sexual revolution of the 1960s, sex was seldom discussed openly; it was protected, and was something to which one only intimated. However, with appeals to the First Amendment, freedom of expression became increasingly linked with freedom of *sexual* expression, without boundaries. Since the 1960s, what was once culturally unacceptable except for late night television seems *de rigueur* even during the family hour. Now what once was a

sexual innuendo has become quite explicit to the point of a kind of non-critical form of promiscuity, whether it is in the soft-porn advertising for clothing or the easy availability of hard-core pornography itself. Just ask any priest hearing confessions as to the increase in those confessing addictive-type behaviors related to watching pornography. Or ask the real reason why many formators of postulants, novices and those in temporary vows (at least in men's congregations) have found it necessary to put blockers on house computers.

Most religious women (and men) over sixty will tell you that they never really considered celibacy as a critical component when they made their decision to enter religious life or make a perpetual commitment to it. It simply came with the package and the package, for them, was mainly about *doing* something apostolic. Only later did they realize celibacy was about *being* something quite different. And, oftentimes, through many mistakes and sins, they finally were able to "make themselves eunuchs" for the sake of that kingdom noted in Matthew 19.

Proponents of a more culturally conservative form of Catholicism will point to the relatively large numbers entering some traditional forms of religious life. These communities are identified with specific apostolic activities (often episcopally sanctioned and supported), unquestioning acceptance of Vatican decrees, and strict communal prayer, including daily Mass. They do not recognize that now, as in the past, celibacy is still too often "part of the package." For a time, one's sexual drives are pushed aside as one's identity is reformed, sublimated to the power and prestige that often is association with being part of such groups.

However, those touting the success of such conservative groups do not note that these often tend to be, with some notable exceptions, *newer* expressions of the older forms of apostolic religious life. The August, 2009 report on "Recent Vocations to Religious Life" published by the National Religious Vocation Conference shows that, while 32% of women's congregations associated with the more progressive Leadership Conference of Women Religious have no women in initial formation, 26% of the traditional groups belonging to the

Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious have none as well. This shows that many conservative communities are diminishing as rapidly as progressive communities. If such a community is growing and it is international, it often is getting its recruits from jurisdictions abroad. These data raise a question about the size of the pool of potential candidates for religious life, and lead to my final point.

4. THE PRACTICAL REASONS FOR CELIBACY ARE LESS AND LESS CONVINCING.

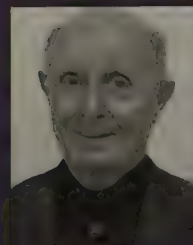
Recently I had conversations with several people working with young adult Catholics. Consistently they pointed to polls showing that Catholics between twenty and thirty-five (the desired age for most candidates to religious life) have less and less allegiance to authoritarian-based religious models. Indeed only 15% of this cohort are attracted to such forms. If this is so, it follows that the existing religious communities that are more traditional (such as those noted above) will continue to attract such people, *but they will not be the norm*; they will appeal merely to the 15% of Catholics within this cohort who are seeking such a form of religious life.

So, then, what is the norm for the wider cohort of younger Catholics who previously might have felt called to religious life? Simply stated, these young people are finding prayer groups and other such faith-based supports to help them sustain their various ministries. Many young people seeking temporary expressions of apostolic and communal life find such programs as the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, my own province's CapCorps, and other volunteer programs like the Catholic Worker. Those who want to spend their foreseeable futures in full-time apostolic activity have found outlets without having to commit to lifelong celibacy. Some of these are found among new ecclesial movements like Focolare and Communion and Liberation, or the more conservative Opus Dei.

A good example of this shift comes from the demographics revealing the largest source producing educated lay ministers in the United States: the religious studies programs at Catholic colleges. The Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University in Chicago

is one such example. Founded almost fifty years ago, it once served mainly women religious. Now its students are mainly lay people, with the number of young adults increasing each year. Teaching there last summer, among my class of twenty, I had at least five young students. I believe that these are the candidates who may have considered religious life in past decades. Today they can pray and minister with others without needing to remain celibate.

Given the above, I think it is safe to conclude that the days of huge numbers of people in non-clerical forms of religious life have ended. I don't think that this change has occurred because religious congregations are too liberal or too questioning of the Vatican. They have done nothing wrong (as many believe to be the case in the Vatican Inquiry); they are simply the faithful remnant of an era that honored celibacy in a way that will not likely come again. While I believe some lifelong communal forms of celibacy will remain, I think that among men, most candidates will go to the clerical groups and not the communities of brothers. For the women, especially the mainline groups, candidates will be fewer and far between.



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Finale of the

The major accomplishment of John Updike must be his novels about Rabbit Angstrom, once a basketball star in a small-town high school who went through adult life without ever quite growing up. The last of the sequence, *Rabbit at Rest*, shows him aging badly but determining to truck on. At one point toward the end, his ego and his old sporting urge make him challenge a black teenager to a game we used to call hunch (21 points) on a basketball court. He is holding his own against him and is keyed up for a winning shot when the inevitable heart attack comes. It is just a few more pages to Rabbit's finale in intensive care, with his son and estranged wife. Updike, once a hoop star himself from a Pennsylvania town, has ended up his history of Rabbit with the big-time failure to act his age.

You have to admire some people who resist acting their age. Like the old chow roaming our neighborhood in Tijuana, they do not see themselves as mangy, but rather as still dominant, even when hurting all over. As one new arrival complained to the director of our Jesuit retirement center in California, "I didn't join the Society of Jesus to retire, but to die saving souls." He preferred to burn out, as many a saint has done. Trouble is, he failed to consider what a burden he would be to others meanwhile and what a different kind of opportunity lay before him, a new call from the Lord. A former director of this same retirement center lays some blame on Jesuit spirituality itself—the all-or-nothing spirit—for this outlook which has no place for scaling down.

My heart goes out, as I said, to the all-out man or woman, brother, priest, religious sister or pope—resistant to the retirement center or even to the reduction of duties. Still, burn-out does not really seem part of God's plan for us. It is not exactly what the Bible had in mind in its prize declaration on aging:

The just shall flourish like the palm tree,
shall grow like the cedar of Lebanon.
Planted in the house of the Lord,
they shall flourish in the courts of our God,
They shall bear fruit even in old age,
always vigorous and sturdy. (Psalm 92:13-15)

For healthy aging, whether or not we are vigorous and sturdy, the best account I have seen to date is Joan Chittister's book, *The Gift of Years* (BlueBridge, 2008). Sister Joan's Benedictine wisdom about the third age is pithy and aphoristic!

She addresses herself to the question, "What am I when I am not what I used to do?" The answer is: You are now focusing more on people than on projects. Your mind is most likely as sharp as ever, with unscripted time to devote to interests. You are not obsolete! Quite the contrary, you are giving a spiritual model, a psychological archetype, to younger generations. Your influence, your apostolate, is as strong as ever, just in a more prayerful mode.

Chittister's reflections, in many brief chapters, treat the third age in Erik Erikson's sensé, as the final developmental period in human life, the time of integration. That is when we get it together, come to terms with ourselves. We let past experiences wash over us for the warmth they bring; we forgive and dismiss all the hurts we can and close the distance we have put between ourselves and others; we learn to trust our own insights as much as those we have been taught.

In the course of *The Gift of Years* we get some emphatic don'ts. Don't internalize stereotypes of the aging person. Don't go into your shell. Don't make the past the acme of your life. Don't start acting old. And don't worry about losing your mind. "Fear of mental collapse becomes the great anxiety of the age." There is nothing you can do about your brain, but the odds are heavily in its favor.



11-Out Person

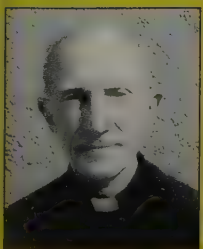
James Torrens, S.J.

Chittister has many a *bon mot* about aging. "Regret is the sand trap of the soul." "Old age is the time to be dangerous. Dangerously fun-loving, dangerously honest." "Our legacies are the quality of the lives we leave behind." "There is still so much for us to do that we have no time, no right, to be sad." What exactly do we have to do? Her answer: "As long as we breathe we have a responsibility for the cocreation of the world, for the good of the human race."

All of Chittister's chapters begin with some gem of wisdom from the past. My favorite is by the poet Ann Sexton: "In a dream you are never eighty." That's where I am now and she's right.

Look around you, our author urges. People who are comfortable with themselves and happy and even proud of what they have done are everywhere. She calls them "spiritual refugees" from the global economy. Each of us can be one of those, for the people of God, for the good of the kingdom.

Looking back at my doughty old friend, the lion of Playas de Tijuana, my thoughts drift to a wonderful woman from yesteryear, a Religious Sister of Mercy who was the director of Saint Joseph's Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan, when I was in graduate school there. Her name was Sister Leonette, or Lioness! She was dominant in all good senses. Sensible as she was, I have every reason to trust that she aged as gracefully as *El León*.



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The Lion

"El león," I said to myself often navigating the potholes of the calle near us in Playas de Tijuana, where he planted himself facing traffic.

A lion he looked and thought himself, old chow dog, the challenger, his dark mane in tatters, his purple lips over the lost bite.

You had to respect his patriarchy, an eye out for the neighborhood where his growl was once to fear. Hurray for you, lion, lumbering off.

Bro. Ben Harrison, M.C.

A TOUCH IN THE DARKNESS

A Reflection on Bereavement and Vocation

It was more than fifty years ago, but I remember it clearly. My sister woke me and took me into her room and was showing me the trinkets on her dresser when my father came in. He spoke to her over my head and asked, "Have you told him?" She shook her head. He sat with me on the bed and said, with a sob, "Son, God has taken Mumma home to heaven." I had never seen him choked up before, but still I was hurt that he could say that her "home" was so far from us.

That was the watershed moment of my life. Nothing was the same after that. The roomy, comfortable surroundings of my childhood proved themselves a cheap, painted stage-set, a canvas backdrop ripped and tattered by a falling beam. Behind it, the bare brickwork, pulleys and coiled ropes, the machinery of illusion, were exposed for all to see. I went to my room, climbed back in bed, grabbed the little terry-cloth pillow she had made for me and cried into it until it was sodden.

I was eleven. But in that moment I felt like a grown tree, wind-struck and storm-broken. Sometimes I have been with a young family and suddenly realized that their child was eleven years old. It always surprises me to see how small, how fragile eleven looks.

It was spring and hyacinths were blooming on the day of her burial. Their scent still awakens that ancient sorrow. It was deemed best for me not to go to the funeral—I don't know, perhaps they were afraid that I would blubber. As far as I remember, nobody explained to me what had happened, how she had died, or how I was expected to react. I went to school as usual the following Monday. I will not recount here the long story leading up to that moment except to say that the vibrant



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household of my preschool days had been sobered and silenced by Mumma's long struggle with cancer, and by my older sisters' and brother's gradual departures for college and eventual marriages. Rather, what I want to reflect on is how my mother's death influenced my spiritual search and my vocation.

I sometimes think that her loss is what caused me to start thinking about the great questions of good and evil, of good fortune and suffering, and to start searching for the truth that underlay the social conventions and familial illusions that seemed so false in the light of her death. We had been a church-going family, and we had prayed every evening that God would "bless Mumma and make her well." I had not had any doubts that he would do so. So when she died, I had to conclude that either God wasn't there or he was weak or heartless. I found no solace in the faith that had seemed so reassuring to me shortly before. I was also beginning to feel the impulses of adolescence and I didn't want to believe, as some suggested, trying to comfort me, that my mother was still watching over me. I didn't want her to see what I was getting up to. Though there were other people around and some were kind to me even at great personal sacrifice, they were all moving on their own paths, and I still felt a terrible loneliness, rejection and fear. Life seemed utterly empty.

In my early teens I liked the somber stories of Poe and de Maupassant, drew pictures of knives and guns, dreamed of being a ruthless gangster, lost myself in violent fantasies, wrote stories where people died of snake-bites or were impaled on spikes or crushed under

piles of jagged rocks. Later I was drawn to the works of Melville and Dostoevsky and started reading books about philosophy and psychology, in search of some deeper understanding of the human condition. And I began smoking, drinking and sniffing glue. The few friends I had must have found me a heavy presence. I was the thinker, the contemplative, the philosopher. I found some relief in solitary wanderings in the mountains and fields near home and satisfied my spiritual longings through a kind of pantheistic nature mysticism and an interest in Zen. By the time I finished high school, I had concluded that there was no God and life was a meaningless drudgery that I was too cowardly to end and too venal to discipline into stoical endurance.

Despite that, when I started college, I gravitated toward a student church group under the pastoral care of a magnetic chaplain. After a year of non-judgmental acceptance and friendship in that small community, I gained the trust to unburden myself to Fr. S. He felt that I needed to see a professional therapist, which I did for two years. By the time I was twenty I had begun to understand that a large part of my maladjustment was grief, consisting of anger at the felt abandonment at my mother's death and fear that I was not lovable enough that anyone would stay around for me. I slowly began to emerge from my long isolation.

But then another blow fell on my bruised bones. This pastor, who had so lovingly nurtured me and helped me to begin to have some hope, died in a boating accident, leaving me bereft again. Though I continued to feel a certain spiritual hunger, the notion of



a loving God seemed an outright delusion. I sometimes went to church but always sat in the back and did not participate overtly in any way. And so it continued for seven years—through my remaining year of college, my two years of military service and about three years of hippy-style hitch-hiking around Europe and America. I got a job, identified with Becket's morbid humor and the absurdist teaching of Camus, and experimented with drugs and relationships. Looking back on that period, I see that, in a way, I was challenging fate: if I could survive the Army, hitching back mountain roads in Yugoslavia and Greece, wandering the mean streets of American cities till all hours, popping random pills, hanging around with losers, crazies and criminals, perhaps I had a future after all.

However, it was only after I drank the dregs of my self-indulgence that I realized that following my own inclinations would lead me, sooner or later, to jail, madness or death. At that point, at age twenty-seven, I said, 'If there's Anybody there, you'd better take over here.' And slowly, over the course of the next five years, I found my way back to my Christian faith and to a religious vocation. Now is not the time to go into all the stages and stories of that journey.

A providential opportunity to work as a volunteer with children who had suffered abandonment and abuse helped me to put my own loss into perspective, and finally to see that my mother's death had prepared me to feel concern for others and to help them search for meaning amidst hardship. My gratitude for the compassion that was growing in me eventually enabled me to forgive God for taking her and allowed

me to see that perhaps I had had to go through all that to learn to care about others. After I had been trapped so long in my own misery and self-obsession, I found that simply loving other people was a liberation that made everything that preceded it worthwhile.

FORGING A NEW HEART

Now that long summary is just the background behind the main point I wish to make, which is that a profound childhood experience of loss seems sometimes to be part of the process by which some people find their way to a mature faith and experience a lasting call. A number of spiritual writers, including C.S. Lewis, speak of the mysterious way God sometimes seems to call people through their wounds, their suffering, their weakness. For some of us, God's summons is like a cauterizing touch on an old sore—or perhaps the sore is itself both touch and call. People describe this touch as a burning, a piercing, a being seized. G.M. Hopkins says poignantly, "Over again I feel thy finger and find thee."

Among those who were powerfully affected by the early death of a parent we can count C.S. Lewis himself, Thomas Merton, Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa and many others. Gautama the Buddha was so affected, as was St. Anthony of Egypt, father of Christian monasticism, and many later founders including Ignatius of Loyola and John of the Cross. I have personally known a number of others for whom such a loss irrevocably changed their lives for good or ill.

My hunch is that, when the undergirdings of one's life are rocked and broken by such loss, it causes one to

A profound childhood experience of loss seems sometimes to be part of the process by which some people find their way to a mature faith and experience a lasting call.



call into question all one's previous certainties, to have radical doubt for all simple solutions, and to seek something solid on which to build life again—some plot of uncluttered earth on which one can, after the earthquake, set up a lean-to and plant a bit of corn. Of course, the process varies according to temperament and circumstances. Some people already have the rudiments of a strong faith, others need to search far and wide, experimenting, through trial and error, with various possibilities including wealth, power, pleasure and fame (as in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which was the only part of the Bible that spoke to me in those years). After I had engaged in such a search for a number of years, I slowly circled back toward my Christian faith, but with an entirely different perspective from the conventional faith I had learned as a child and rejected as a youth. As with Jacob in Genesis, it was only after I had done my own wrestling with the mysterious stranger that I could look back and say, "Oh, yes, that must have been the one they were talking about, 'the God of our fathers.'" The Holy One who waylays prophets and patriarchs is not at first recognizable to them as the God of the tradition.

All the same, as someone who has arrived, after a great loss, at a solid faith in God, how do I know that the

one I believe in isn't just some compensatory psychological fantasy, a projection onto blank nothingness of what I have lost, some sort of imaginary friend? I have suspected just that in moments of skepticism and disillusionment. But I habitually test the hypothesis as I would any other. I "try" the validity of my proposition in various situations—grabbing for it when it might not be there, leaning into it when there is no other support, looking for it behind other apparent solidities. And then there is also the person-like evidence—that this Being, whatever it is, seems capable of challenging me in unexpected ways, surprising me into laughter and awe, engaging in a subtle dialogical give and take with me, responding to my dilemmas with unpredictable whimsy, trusting me, gracing me with a sense of presence, gratitude, affection. Above all, there is a logical conviction that behind all that exists and apart from everything whatsoever, there is What Is—a necessary being, the ground of being, that which lends "is-ness" to every passing thing—that particular No-Thing that exists and precedes and contextualizes the big bang or whatever other cosmogony can be proposed. Perhaps none of that will convince a dyed-in-the-wool skeptic, but it will do for me.

BUILDING ON ROCK

So I am suggesting that people who go through a profound experience of loss often seem to need a surer foundation on which to build their life. They have seen how a life built on sand turns out, and they need to dig down to the bedrock. If this foundation happens to be God, it can touch the heart of a person and move them to want to give themselves to it completely. So, I not only have a relationship with the Absolute, but I know that I could not exist without such a relationship. How I describe and experience that relationship is a highly personal matter. What disposes me, then, to want to give myself unreservedly to God, to make my bond with the Absolute my defining relationship? Is it, perhaps, at least for some of us, that we cannot trust our poor, broken selves ultimately and utterly to anyone less than God?

It seems that sometimes the pain and the cataclysmic shock of great loss can render a person unable or unwilling to commit totally to any relationship other than one with the Absolute. In the past year or so, I have said to two or three people who know me well—"I don't think I ever could have married. After all the separations I have

suffered, another abandonment, whether through death, sickness, distance or divorce, would just destroy me. I am simply unable to risk it." It seems almost constitutionally impossible for me to trust myself in an absolute way to anyone but God. I sometimes say, pleading to be understood, "My Velcro is worn out." When I shared with these friends this unwillingness to give myself unconditionally to anyone less than God, I expected them to protest, "Oh, you should face your fears and learn to overcome your misgivings." But they did not. They understood and accepted what I said at face value. And for me that was a tremendous blessing.

Because I know that if I were to go through years of expensive and intensive therapy, I might be able to overcome my fears and marry or make such an unequivocal commitment to another person. But I have found something I value more. In my vocation to the consecrated life as a vowed religious, I have been given a relationship with One who will never abandon me, a relationship that is warm and abiding but that can also vary richly in mood and intensity. Besides, my friendships with many married people over the years convince me that no spouse, no marriage relationship, no matter how intimate, can totally fulfill the infinite need we have for love. Unless both parties in a marriage are grounded in strong, loving relationships with friends and with a Higher Power, they risk burdening each other with unrealistic expectations and demands. So even if I were to arrive at a point where I could make such a commitment to another mortal, I would still absolutely need my bond with the one whom I call Way, Truth, Life.

Besides, not only does my vocation give me an opportunity to grow in this foundational relationship with God, but it also gives me the reflective time to know myself and process my experiences. And it gives me the occasion to share intimately with numerous others without getting short-circuited into possessiveness and emotional entanglements.

A LASTING TRUTH

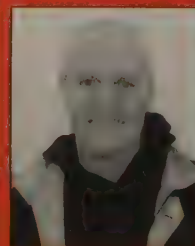
My conclusion is that my mother's death precipitated a process of searching for some sort of lasting truth on which to build my life. That search led me, by a winding road, to a personal faith in God. Then that wound of grief that I could not heal was the very means by which God claimed me, called me and made me his own. Those spiritual writers who speak this way of God as calling us by means of our wounds and weakness, as touching our hearts through our poverty and brokenness, have a wonderful insight. Jesus undermined Peter's impetuous, rock-like stubbornness by one piercing look and claimed his heart forever. Mary Magdalene was done in by her own passionate need and desperate longing. Christ unhorsed Paul, tempering his hot-headed arrogance with temporary blindness and an enduring "thorn in the flesh." He captured Francis, the failed troubadour, and Ignatius, the injured warrior. And so on down through the centuries. The doctor who suffers chronic sickness is the charismatic wounded healer. The psychologist who sometimes fears for his own sanity is the gifted therapist. The hopeless alcoholic in recovery is the addiction counselor who understands to the core those in his charge.

So we could say that sometimes God touches us in a way that wounds us, but the very wound is the invitation, the tap on the shoulder that beckons us to follow, the word of possession that claims us for his own, the grasp of proprietorship that impels us to do the job at hand. Note that I am not making a general statement that things always happen this way. I am only reflecting on my own experience and a pattern that I have noticed in some other lives. The loss that broke my heart for the first time also drove me in the end to seek the One who held the pieces and could forge within me a new heart, through fire, turbulence and toil, again and again.

I was talking with a friend a year or so ago, another man who had lost one of his parents at an early age. He suggested that I read Maxine Harris's book, *The Loss That Is Forever*. That book helped

me to see that there are many possible responses to the early loss of parents and that my response, though not typical, follows some patterns and makes a certain kind of sense. After all these years, the sore place is still there and can still hurt. Reflecting on all this, I became aware that the thing that seems, at this point, most painful is the fact that my mother did not feel the need to say good-bye, to reassure me of her love or to give me her blessing. That, I think, would have made a tremendous difference. But I take comfort in words that the older of my two sisters wrote to me at the time of my final profession as a religious, when I was forty. She said, "Mumma would be so proud of you today. She wanted a fourth child so badly and tried for so long before you were conceived. I think she dedicated you to God before you were born." Perhaps that is blessing enough.

And in any case, now Jesus is my heaven, and he is very close, even in my heart. So she is not so far away after all.



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CI





James Randolph Jordan, D. Min.

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“They took Daddy to the hospital this afternoon,” Ronnie said without emotion. “He had another heart attack. They’re sayin’ he’s only got about a 30 percent chance of makin’ it through the night.” I pulled over to the side of the road, stopped the car and held the phone closer to my ear. “They say if he does make it through the night,” my brother continued, “his chances will improve. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Awright,” I answered. “Let me know if there’s any change.”

“I will.”

“You awright?” I asked.

“Yeah ... tired,” he responded.

“Thanks for being there,” I said.

“No problem.” And with that, our phone call ended as suddenly as it had begun.

Ronnie was my oldest brother. And even though our middle brother, Ricky, and I had decided our lives would be better if we lived far away from Richmond—away from our parents and the pain of those relationships—Ronnie chose to live within a half-hour’s drive of our mother and father. With that decision, he became the responsible one—the one who would interact with our parents on birthdays, holidays and special occasions, the one who would run the special errands that were required on occasion and the one to tend to their needs as they aged.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, our father had become that which he had sworn he never would be—a violent, raging alcoholic with an uncontrollable temper who often directed vicious anger toward those he loved most.

My brothers and I were the product of a marriage which began in 1951 and lasted for almost 20 years. The two decades our mother and father were together and raising three boys were anything but happy or blissful. Both of our parents—Mumma and Daddy as we called them—were themselves adult-children of alcoholic fathers, men who had abused their wives as well as the children they produced. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, our father had become that which he had sworn he never would be—a violent, raging alcoholic with an uncontrollable temper who often directed vicious anger toward those he loved most. And by 1965, our parents' marriage was quickly deteriorating.

In 1966, one of our father's indiscretions—a 17 year-old girl from the backwoods of Virginia—became pregnant. Without divorcing our mother, he set up house with the young girl, Claudette, and started a second family in a small, rural farming community just west of Fredericksburg. Just as in the 1930s our grandfather had managed two wives with two sets of children in two distinct households, Daddy was doing the same thing. It didn't last very long.

By the late 1960s, my parents' marriage was over. It was a horrible time, filled with incredible pain, loneliness, despair and an oppressive sense of abandonment for our mother as well as for Ronnie, Ricky and myself. Daddy had chosen his "other family" over ours. As most children do, we hoped things would eventually get better—that the time would come when life once again would offer us some type of normalcy. But in midsummer of 1967, Daddy collected all of his belongings and moved out.

Divorce is never an easy, quick or simple thing, and when children are involved, it is even worse. In my adult years, whenever I have spoken about my childhood with a therapist or mental health professional, they inevitably use the term "broken home." I would correct them.

"Broken" sounds like a few pieces of glass lying on the kitchen floor," I explain. "Divorce—especially when children are involved—is a lot messier than that. The thing most children hold dearest to them is their family—a

series of relationships that are intricately and deeply intertwined. It is the child's source of who they are—their identity. If you asked me who I was when I was eight years old, I would have told you my name, the names of my brothers, who my parents were and where my house was. For a child, those individual relationships form a single entity. That single thing, that family is the source of security, the source of love and grace—the grace that gives a child the knowledge that there is a unique, blood-bond between these people, that this family is where I belong."

"Now, imagine that the family is gone," I would continue. "Unlike something that is 'broken,' it cannot be mended or put back together again. As a child, you have no idea what is going to happen to you. Your world—the world as you knew it—is suddenly gone forever. You feel lost, insecure, abandoned and perhaps even scared to death. Some children even feel a sense of hopelessness. Divorce doesn't break a family; it kills it—and there is no hope of resurrection. Once divorce occurs, a person can no longer say, 'I am going to stay with my family.' They can only say I am going to stay with my brother or sister or mother or father. The family is gone—dead. And in one way or another, people will always grieve something that has died."

When I didn't hear from Ronnie again for another 24 hours, I realized that just as he had numerous times during the last 20 years, Daddy had made it through another health crisis. In many ways, our father's health and his uncanny ability to cheat death had become a recurring joke. While years of alcoholism and a five-pack-a-day cigarette habit had taken their toll on his heart, lungs and nearly every other organ, over the course of two decades—even though he had come close to death—my father had survived at least three strokes, seven heart attacks and an aneurism in his aorta. Nevertheless, he always managed to return to the land of the living, willing to curse death and perhaps a doctor or nurse who might be in the same room.

Nearly two days had passed since Ronnie and I had first spoken when the phone rang again. "Hey," the voice said



on the other end of the telephone. It was Ronnie. "Well, things were looking up until this morning," he said with a bit more emotion than his voice usually revealed. "About three hours ago, he began going down hill. He's been hooked up to a ventilator and an automatic defibrillator since he was admitted, but the doctors are now saying we should disconnect him, that his heart is just too weak to recover. He's just existing right now." He stopped speaking for just a few seconds, then continued. "So that's what we're going to do."

"Okay," I said after a very short pause of my own. Beneath our conversation I was still trying to listen for something unsaid, something unspoken—to determine if Ronnie was overreacting in some way, if this really was going to be the end of my father's life.

"Just wanted to let you know," he concluded.

Our conversation ended as quickly as they usually did. As I hung up the phone, I sat thinking about my father, but not too much. For years I had wondered how I would respond to his death, wondering what kind of thoughts would enter my mind when the man who had abused my brothers and me in ways too terrible to describe was finally gone. So before I began considering too seriously that my father might really be dying, I wanted to make sure it was actually going to happen. Whatever the

mental struggle or anguish was going to be, I didn't want to go through it prematurely. Before I started down that road, I wanted to make sure it was time.

I lay in bed thinking about what was happening in my father's hospital room more than 300 miles away—and slowly I fell asleep. The night passed. The next morning, as the rays of an August sun began heating up the day, there was no word from my brother. More than a few times, I laughed to myself thinking I had almost been duped into too hastily contemplating my father's death. The old man was beating the odds once again, I thought. The old adage, "only the good die young," was certainly true. I convinced myself to give it one more day and Ronnie would be calling to tell me Daddy was sitting up and eating breakfast, making suggestive remarks to a pretty young nurse.

It was two-thirty in the afternoon when my brother did finally call again. And once more, the conversation was short.

"He's gone."

"What?" I asked.

"Daddy's gone . . . about 10 minutes ago."

I sat with the phone pressed hard against the side of my head, not sure what to say. I tried to speak, to say something, to make some noise, but I couldn't.

"You there?" he asked.

I tried harder to say anything.

"Yeah," I said in a whisper that crept up from the back of my throat. "Thanks. I'll call you back later on." And with that, I hung up. My father was dead.

In the hours that followed, I cried. Sometimes a few tears streaked down my cheeks; other times, there were heavy, heaving sobs. Each time the tears came, though, I was still unable to identify the exact emotion that had triggered the response. Throughout much of the following day, it seemed an assortment of emotions each took their turn rising to the surface. There was anger—anger at the death of my father, that life had somehow cheated me of what I was entitled to—a loving, caring parent. Then came sadness, sadness at how my father's life appeared to be a waste of humanity. Loneliness and abandonment soon followed, feelings I had known nearly all my life. As each of these rose, then subsided, they eventually seemed to swell into an overwhelming wave of grief that came crashing down upon me. I grieved the family I was born into. I grieved the life I had been given. I grieved the things that never were. Most of all, though, I grieved my father and what he never became.

During the six hour drive to Richmond, I fended off any temptation to cry, instead imagining what would be awaiting me at the funeral home. Even though I always dreaded seeing relatives I had long ago decided not to keep in

I began to wonder if anyone at all would show up at my father's funeral. Would it simply be Ronnie, Ricky and me standing at my father's coffin, praying for a man who died alone and without remorse?

touch with, they would be there. Or would they? My father had burned bridges long ago with so many of those I had known years before. His anger, his hatred, his seething contempt for so much of the world ate away at his soul. Mile after mile, as my thoughts unfurled, I began to wonder if anyone at all would show up at my father's funeral. Would it simply be Ronnie, Ricky and me standing at my father's coffin, praying for a man who died alone and without remorse?

It was nearly 7 o'clock in the evening when I arrived at the funeral home. The parking lot was filled to near-capacity. Since it was one of Richmond's largest funeral homes, though, I knew that other viewings would be going on at the same time as Daddy's. As I walked through the front doors, I was greeted by an older gentleman wearing a black suit who stood with his hands folded neatly in front of him. No worry about this guy, I reminded myself. "You don't know this guy, he's the greeter."

"Jordan," I said looking around.

"The parlor down the hallway to the left, sir," he answered.

After only a few steps down a wide corridor, I heard voices that grew louder. As I approached the parlor, people were gathered in the hall nearly blocking the entrance to the room. To my amazement, the room was filled to capacity with men and women of every age and color, children and babies as well. Some people were talking, others laughing—some sobbed lightly. Each of them was engaged in some sort of discourse with another. One familiar face after another came to welcome me home, their words and presence reminding me of that time in my life when I had a father who lived with his family.

As words rang in my ears—reminiscences of a life long ago—I heard very little. Instead, my mind scanned the identities of those in the room. To the far left was my brother, Ricky, who had arrived from Louisiana. Across the room was my father's second wife, Claudette. Scattered throughout the parlor were my father's six children from his "other family;" I struggled to remember all their names. Then there were uncles, aunts, old neighbors,

cousins and friends I had not seen in more than 30 years. Peppered here and there were those faces totally unfamiliar to me, perhaps relatives, possibly friends I had forgotten or simply did not want to remember. No matter how many faces I saw, though, what returned to my mind was the anguish and pain most of these people had endured at the hands of my father. Memories of blood and brutality, physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse covered the room like a pall.

In the midst of the crowd stood an obviously unfamiliar gentleman, a clergyman I deduced to be Catholic. After a few more minutes of revisiting, I made my way over to the priest.

"Hello, Father," I said introducing myself, "I'm one of Richard's sons."

"I'm sorry for your loss," the priest responded, "I'm Father David."

"Are you leading the service tomorrow?" I asked.

"Yes," he said with a slight smile.

Thoughts quickly began to whirl through my mind. What would he say about my father to the people who stood in this room, people who still bore the wounds of his transgressions? What could he ever say?

"Do you know much about my father?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "for the last few months your father and I met every Monday. I would bring him Holy Communion and then we would pray together. He liked to pray the rosary. We talked quite a bit—at least your brother tells me it was a lot for your father," he laughed lightly.

"Do you know much about his past?" I asked.

"Well, no," Fr. David continued. "That's something he never talked about. We mostly talked about what was going on in his life now, what his concerns were. Your father knew he was a very sick man, that his health was deteriorating rapidly."

"I want to tell you about my father," I said. But before I could say any more, one of my brothers called to me from across the room, trying to get my attention. "Excuse me, Father, I'll come back."

For the next hour or so, one conversation after another pulled me from one corner of the parlor to the

other. Finally, nearly the last visitor had left—and so had Fr. David. Tomorrow, I thought. I'll speak with him first thing.

It was late when I got back to my hotel room. Relatives had invited me to spend the night with them, but I wanted to be alone. For some reason, being alone in Richmond felt more normal.

I really cannot say when it happened or why. But sometime during the night I began to re-hear the words of the multitude of conversations I had witnessed since my arrival at the funeral home. While a number of the discussions were the anticipated remembrances of the past, the majority of exchanges were narratives of the final months of Daddy's life. One adult-child after another told of how my father had asked for forgiveness, telling of his profound sorrow for the pain he had inflicted. They spoke of how his heart was obviously broken by the knowledge of the torment and suffering he had visited upon so many. They spoke as witnesses, seeing a man who was humbled by the effects of sin and shame. As I watched and listened to each of them, I realized that my father's other family was also my own. That through some mystical union, two worlds had collided revealing the complex interconnectedness that is so much a part of the human condition—connectedness of communal suffering, death, redemption and resurrection that all too often goes unnoticed. In the midst of my father's death, life was taking on a new meaning for so many. Something was changing.

The next morning, I arrived at the funeral home early, sitting with family members in a large room off to the side of the parlor where my father's body lay. I said hello to Fr. David and sat next to Ronnie who was busy tidging with papers and notes concerning the order of the funeral service.

"I want to say something during the service," I said leaning over to him. He looked at me without saying anything. After a few seconds of silence, he nodded.

As the service started, our family moved into the larger parlor to sit



***“So it doesn’t
matter what Daddy
did or didn’t do
years ago. What’s
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among others who had come to bury my father. We sang a few hymns, and after Fr. David offered the prescribed prayers and benedictions, it was time for the sharing of any remembrances. I collected my thoughts, walked to the front of the room and looked out at Ronnie and Ricky as well as my other brothers and sisters whose faces were stained from tears.

“Last night,” I began, “I spoke to Fr. David and asked him about Daddy. I asked him if he knew my father. He told me he had come to know Daddy over the last few months and that he had brought him Communion once a week and was praying with him every Monday. Then I asked Fr. David if he knew my father’s past. And he told me no, that Daddy didn’t want to talk about his past. Last night, I was determined to tell him about Daddy, to tell him about my father’s past. But then I realized something. I realized that it doesn’t matter any more, because at some point during the past few months or year, Daddy changed.

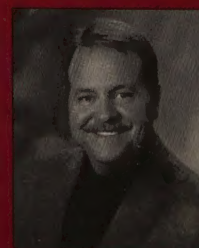
“In one of the Gospel stories that Jesus shared with his followers, he tells them of a man who owned a vineyard. When the man hires workers for the vineyard, he tells them how much he will pay each of them and each of the workers agrees to work for that price. But at the end of the day, the laborers who had been in the vineyard all day find out that those who came to work right before quitting time get the same pay as the workers who had been there all day. They are angry; they say it is unfair. How can someone who has been laboring for just an hour get the same pay as those who have been in the vineyard all day?

“But that’s the way God is. He loves us that much.

“So it doesn’t matter what Daddy did or didn’t do years ago. What’s important is that in his last days, he loved God.”

After the graveside service at the cemetery, I stood and looked at the scores of granite slabs inscribed with the names of so many others who have lived and died, with their own stories once told and now long forgotten. I imagined the sons and daughters who brought their parents to this place, some sobbing loudly, others not so much. I thought of the children who wished they had

known their parents under different circumstances, or not known their parents at all. And after gazing at the hundreds of stone tablets spread across the hills, I walked over to the heap of flowers that covered my father’s casket and plucked a small blossom. I will place it between the pages of a family Bible—somewhere in the middle of Matthew’s Gospel, near the story of a man who owned a vineyard. Those who see it will ask about it and in the days and years to come I will tell them of a man who loved his family, the man I called my father.



James Randolph Jordan, D. Min., is a professional writer and serves as a Catholic lay evangelist in the Diocese of Camden, NJ. Additional information about his ministry is available at www.catholic-evangelist.net.

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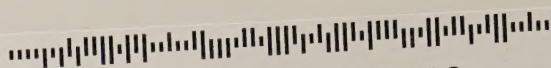
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